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# epic™

## ILLUSTRATED

3rd Issue

new dimensions in adult fantasy and science-fiction featuring Michael Moorcock's "The Dreaming City"

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# epic ILLUSTRATED

FALL 1980 VOL. 1, NO. 3

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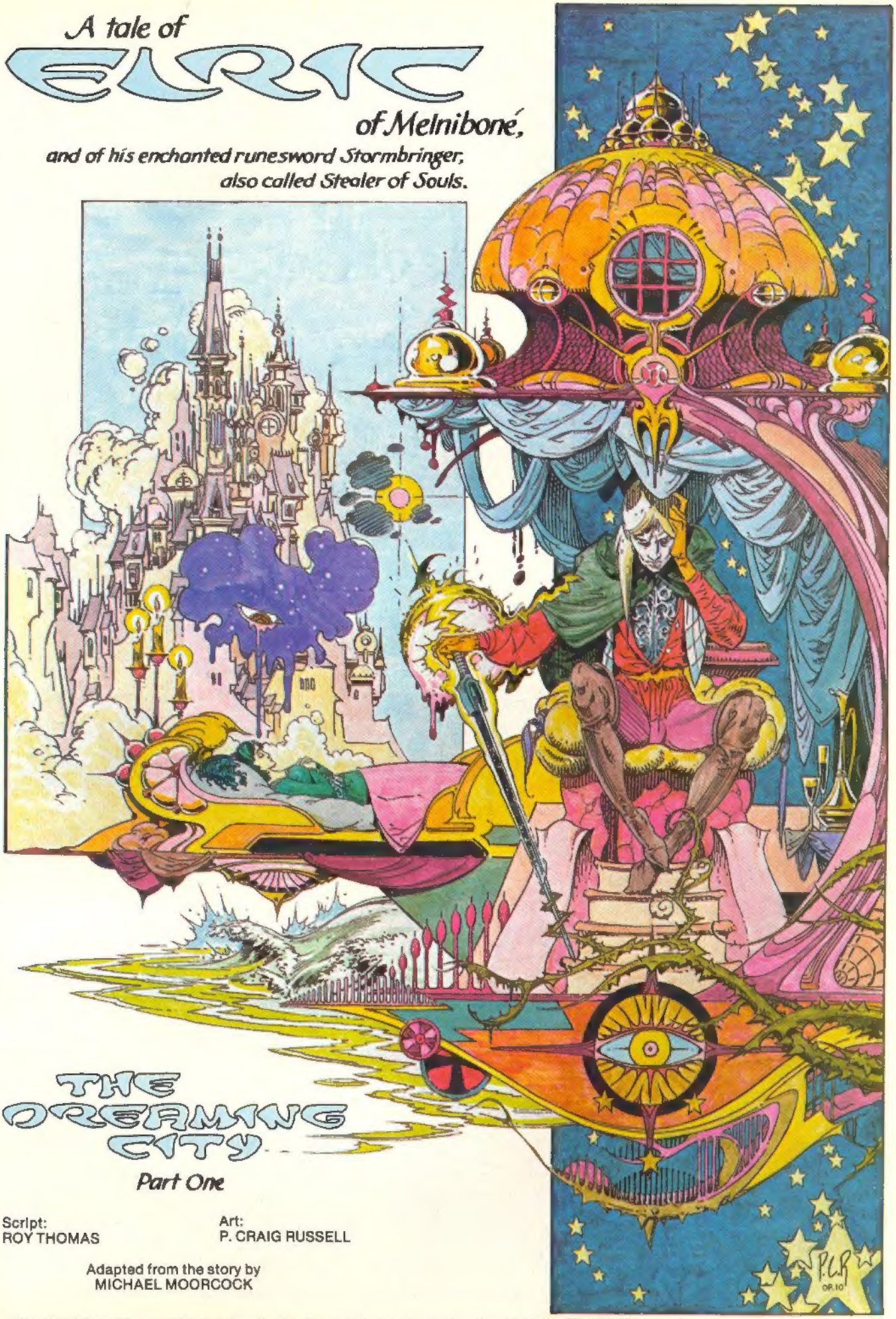
A tale of

# ELRIC

of Melniboné,

and of his enchanted runesword Stormbringer,
also called Stealer of Souls.



## THE DREAMING CITY

Part One


Script:
ROY THOMAS

Art:
P. CRAIG RUSSELL

Adapted from the story by
MICHAEL MOORCOCK



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SOMEWHERE ON THE LONELY COAST OF A WINDSWEPT FJORD, A HEAVY, OAKEN DOOR IS FLUNG WIDE...

... AND THE LIGHT FROM WITHIN SENDS SHADOWS FORTH TO FENCE WITH THOSE LURKING OUTSIDE.
SORRY I'M LATE, MY FRIENDS.
WHAT'S THE HOUR?
MIDNIGHT IS LONG PAST, COUNT SMIORGAN.
ARE YOU STILL SURE HE'LL COME?
IT'S SAID THAT HE'S A MAN OF HIS WORD...
... IF THAT COMFORTS YOU.
THAT'S SO-- FOR ALL YOUR IRONY, YARIS.
HE'LL COME, RIGHT ENOUGH.
HE'S GROWN BITTER, AND HAS NO LOVE FOR HIS COUSIN. WHY SHOULD HE?
AFTER ALL, YYRKOON SITS THE RUBY THRONE IN HIS PLACE, AND HAS PROCLAIMED HIM AN OUTCAST-- A TRAITOR.
HE NEEDS US...
... SO WE CAN TRUST HIM.

YOU'RE FULL OF TRUST TONIGHT, COUNT-- A RARE THING TO FIND IN THESE TROUBLED TIMES.
BUT, PERHAPS I SPEAK TO MEN MORE CREDULOUS THAN I.
WHAT OF YOU, DHARMIT? SHALL WE WASTE MORE TIME WAITING ON ELRIC'S PLEASURE?
THINK YOU NOT, FADAN OF LORMYR, THAT HE'S EVEN NOW LAUGHING AT US IN SOME DISTANT TAVERN?
AND YOU, KING NACLON--DO YOU NOT SUSPECT HE MAY BE PLOTTING WITH THE DRAGON PRINCES TO ENTRAP US, AT THIS VERY MOMENT?
AND YOU, JIKU-- DO NOT THINK--
I THINK, YARRIS, THAT YOU BEGIN TO BORE ME WITH YOUR PRATTLE.
WELL, I'M NEITHER BORED... NOR YET CONVINCED.
HAVE YOU EVIDENCE TO BACK YOUR CHARGES, YARIS?
I ONLY KNOW THAT WE HAVE TOO LITTLE TIME IN WHICH TO STRIKE; OUR FLEET IS TOO BIG, TOO NOTICEABLE.
I SAY, LET'S SET SAIL NOW, BEFORE THE DREAMING CITY HEARS OF OUR PLAN AND BRINGS UP REINFORCEMENTS!
YOU KNOW WE CANNOT REACH IMRRYR WITHOUT ELRIC'S HELP.
WE MUST WAIT FOR HIM-- OR ELSE GIVE UP OUR PLANS AND RETURN TO OUR HOMELANDS.
BY THE GODS, YOU'RE GETTING OLD, ALL OF YOU!
TREASURES ARE WON ONLY BY SWIFT SLAYING AND RECKLESS ATTACK!
FOOL!
I SPOKE THUS IN MY YOUTH... AND LOST A FINE FLEET SOON AFTER.

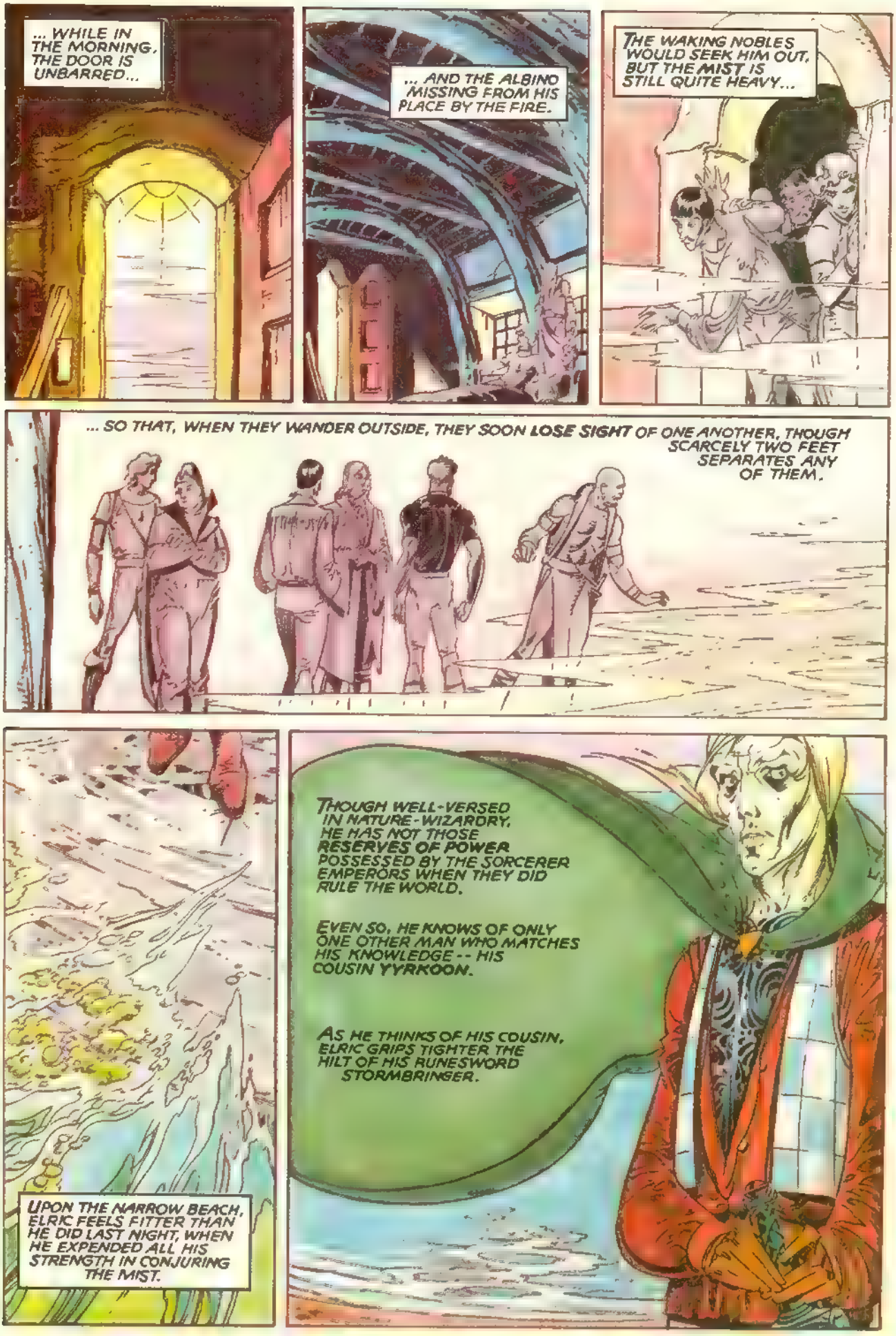
IT'S TRUE-- WE STAND HERE, THE MOST POWERFUL SEA LORDS IN THE WORLD.
OUR NAMES ARE FEARED AND FAMOUS; OUR FLEETS RAVAGE THE COASTS OF A SCORE OF LESSER NATIONS.
WE HOLD POWER!
BUT ALL THIS IS USELESS-- WITHOUT THE POWER THAT ELRIC HAS.
THE POWER OF KNOWLEDGE-- OF SORCERY. IF I MUST USE THE HATED WORD!
IMRRYR, THE DREAMING CITY, DREAMS IN PEACE-- AND WILL CONTINUE TO DO SO UNLESS HE GUIDES US THROUGH THE TREACHEROUS WATERWAYS WHICH LEAD TO HER HARBORS.
WE NEED ELRIC. WE KNOW IT, AND HE KNOWS IT.
THAT'S THE TRUTH!
SUCH CONFIDENCE, GENTLEMEN...
...IS WARMING TO THE HEART.
WHAT REMAINS OF YARIS' BRAVADO FLEES FROM HIM AS HE MEETS THE CRIMSON EYES OF THIS PURE ALBINO WHO AFFECTS THE DRESS OF A SOUTHERN BARBARIAN.
THEY ARE OLD EYES IN A FINE-FEATURED, YOUTHFUL FACE... EYES WHICH STARE INTO ETERNITY.

WELL? IS NO ONE GOING TO INVITE ME IN?
VERY WELL.
ELRIC, OLD FRIEND--WHEN DO WE RAID IMRRYR?
AS SOON AS YOU LIKE.
I CARE NOT.
I NEED ONLY A LITTLE TIME IN WHICH TO DO... CERTAIN THINGS.
TOMORROW? SHALL WE SAIL TOMORROW?
THREE DAYS' TIME... PERHAPS MORE.
BUT-- IMRRYR WILL BE WARNED OF OUR PRESENCE BY THEN!
I'LL SEE THAT YOUR FLEET'S NOT DISCOVERED. BUT I MYSELF MUST GO TO IMRRYR FIRST... AND RETURN.
IN THREE DAYS? THE FASTEST SHIP COULD NOT--
I'LL BE IN THE DREAMING CITY IN LESS THAN A DAY.
IF YOU SAY SO, I'LL BELIEVE IT-- BUT WHY THIS NECESSITY TO VISIT THE CITY AHEAD OF THE RAID?
I'VE MY OWN COMPUNCTIONS, COUNT SMORGAN... BUT WORRY NOT, I SHAN'T BETRAY YOU.
I HAVE A DEBT TO SETTLE; THIS IS MY ONLY REASON FOR AIDING YOU.
AS YOU KNOW, I HAVE MADE ONLY A FEW CONDITIONS: THAT YOU RAZE THE CITY TO THE GROUND, AND THAT A CERTAIN MAN AND WOMAN ARE NOT HARMED.
I REFER TO MY COUSIN YYRKOON AND HIS SISTER CYMORIL...

CYMORIL! AT THE VERY SOUND OF HER NAME UPON HIS OWN PALE LIPS, ELRIC KNOWS VISIONS OF ANOTHER LAND, AND OTHER DAYS.
BUT YYRKOON USURPS THESE VISIONS, ALSO-- EVEN AS HE ONCE USURPED THE RUBY THRONE, FROM WHICH HE WOULD ORDER HIS ALBINO COUSIN'S DEATH, IF EVER HE WERE CAUGHT WITHIN THE WALLS OF IMRRYR.
IMRRYR.
THE DREAMING CITY FELL, IN SPIRIT, FIVE HUNDRED YEARS AGO.
IF ELRIC OF MELNIBONÉ HAS HIS WAY, SHE SOON WILL FALL COMPLETELY-- AND FOREVER.
IMRRYR...

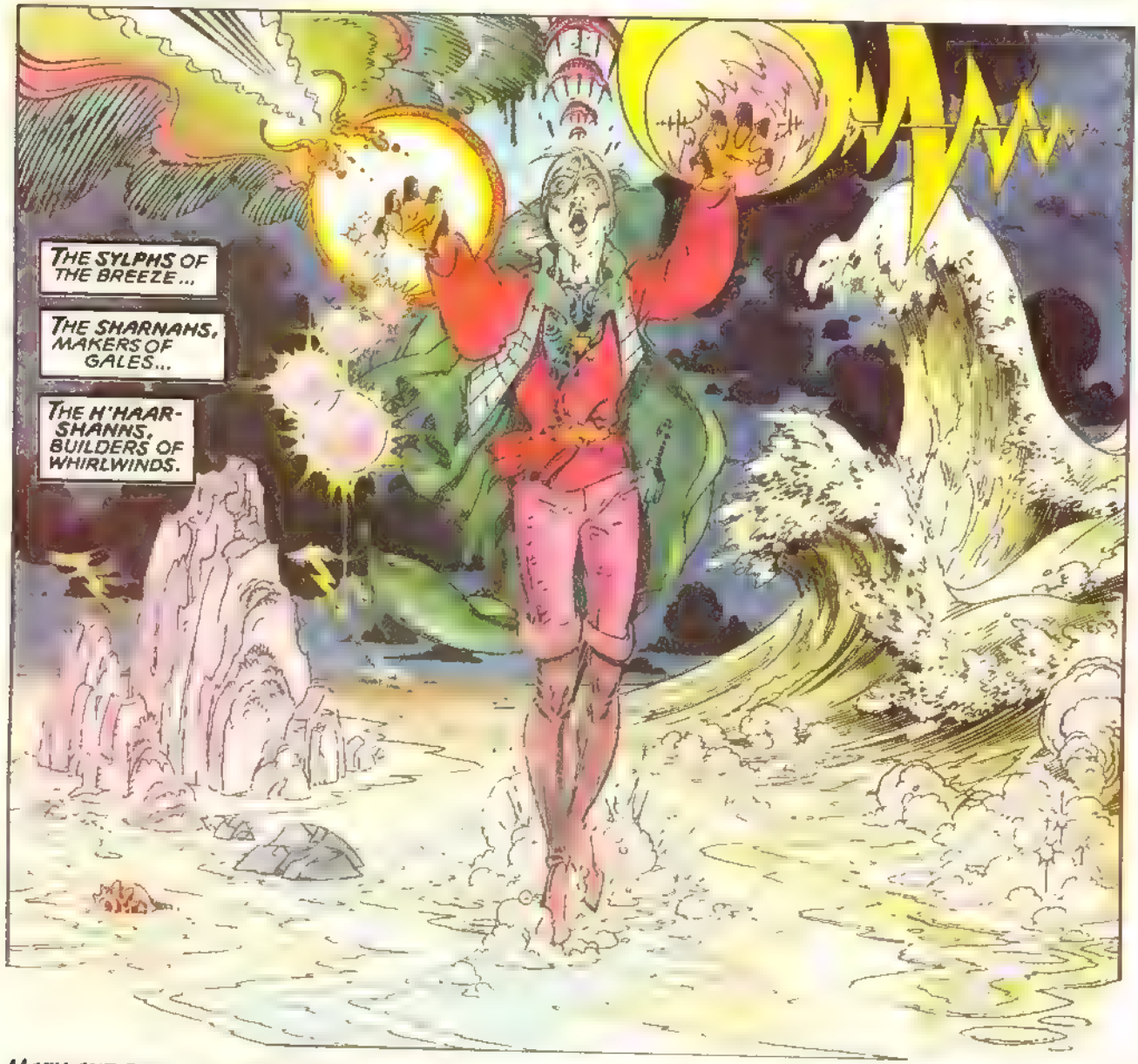
A VOICE WHICH PRETENDS TO MORE CONFIDENCE THAN IT FEELS CALLS HIM BACK...
HOW SHALL WE HIDE THE FLEET, LORD ELRIC?
I'LL GO NOW TO HIDE IT FOR YOU.
COUNT SMIORGAN, WILL YOU MAKE CERTAIN ALL YOU SEA LORDS' MEN ARE OFF THE SHIPS FIRST?
AS YOU WISH, MY FRIEND.
HOW COULD HE HIDE OUR WHOLE FLEET IN THIS SINGLE FJORD?
THE QUESTION HOVERS UNANSWERED IN THE AIR...
...FOR A CONSIDERABLE TIME.
THEN, AT THE SOUND OF A SLAMMING DOOR...
COUNT SMIORGAN! WHY ARE YOU SHIVERING, MAN?
WELL? DID ELRIC HIDE THE FLEET-- OR DID HE NOT?
HE... HAS HIDDEN IT.
ALL AT ONCE? WHAT DID HE DO?
LET ME, DHARMIT.
IT'S NO GOOD.
THE NIGHT MIST'S TOO THICK.

I CAN'T TELL WHETHER OUR SHIPS ARE ANCHORED IN THE FJORD OR NOT.
WAIT! THERE'S SOME-THING--
Uhhh...
WHAT IS IT, YARIS?
IT'S--
--G-GREETINGS, LORD ELRIC--!
WINE.
WINE, DO YOU HEAR ME?
HERE... BUT WHAT...?
I'VE DONE WHAT'S NEEDED... AND IT'S COST ME HARD.
NOW I WILL SLEEP.
NONE OF THE SIX SEA LORDS SLEEPS OVERMUCH THIS NIGHT...

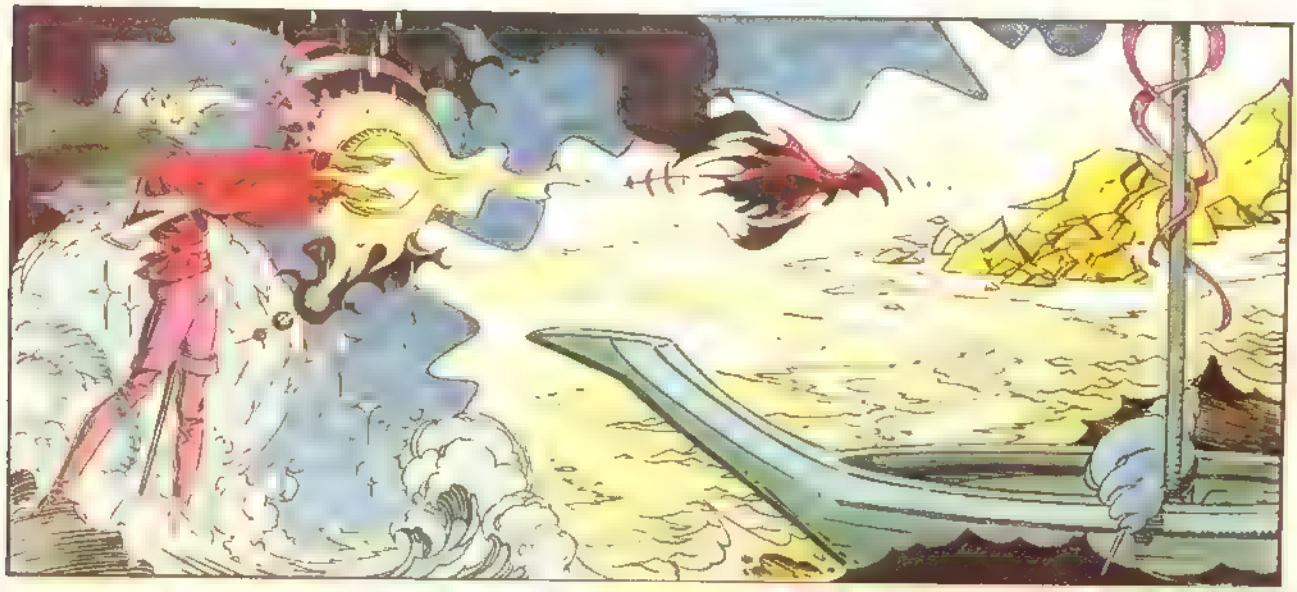

... WHILE IN THE MORNING, THE DOOR IS UNBARRED...
... AND THE ALBINO MISSING FROM HIS PLACE BY THE FIRE.
THE WAKING NOBLES WOULD SEEK HIM OUT, BUT THE MIST IS STILL QUITE HEAVY...
... SO THAT, WHEN THEY WANDER OUTSIDE, THEY SOON LOSE SIGHT OF ONE ANOTHER, THOUGH SCARCELY TWO FEET SEPARATES ANY OF THEM.
UPON THE NARROW BEACH, ELRIC FEELS FITTER THAN HE DID LAST NIGHT, WHEN HE EXPENDED ALL HIS STRENGTH IN CONJURING THE MIST.
THOUGH WELL-VERSED IN NATURE-WIZARDRY, HE HAS NOT THOSE RESERVES OF POWER POSSESSED BY THE SORCERER EMPERORS WHEN THEY DID RULE THE WORLD.
EVEN SO, HE KNOWS OF ONLY ONE OTHER MAN WHO MATCHES HIS KNOWLEDGE -- HIS COUSIN YYRKOON.
AS HE THINKS OF HIS COUSIN, ELRIC GRIPS TIGHTER THE HILT OF HIS RUNESWORD STORMBRINGER.

AWARE OF THE PRESS OF TIME, HE FORCES HIMSELF TO CONCENTRATE UPON HIS PRESENT TASK...
... THE SPEAKING OF SPELLS TO AID HIM ON HIS VOYAGE TO THE ISLE OF THE DRAGON MASTERS, WHOSE ONLY CITY, IMRRYR THE BEAUTIFUL, IS THE OBJECT OF THE SEA LORDS' MASSING.
HIS BODY TENSES.
HE BLANKS HIS CONSCIOUS MIND, SUMMONING SECRETS FROM THE DARK DEPTHS OF HIS SOUL.
SWAYING, HIS EYES STARING UNSEEING, HE MAKES UNHOLY SIGNS IN THE AIR...
AND HE BEGINS TO SPEAK IN A SIBILANT MONOTONE...
... THE PITCH OF HIS VOICE RISING SLOWLY, LIKE THE SHRIEK OF AN APPROACHING GALE.

THEN, QUITE SUDDENLY, THAT VOICE RISES HIGHER, UNTIL IT IS HOWLING WILDLY, INHUMANLY, AS IT SUMMONS THE **WIND ELEMENTALS:**




HAZY AND FORMLESS, THEY EDDY ABOUT HIM AS, STIFF-LIMBED, HE ENTERS HIS OWN SAILING-BOAT.



LIKE AN AUTOMATON, HIS FINGERS RUN UP THE SAIL, SET IT.
THEN, FROM OUT OF THE PLACID SEA, A GREAT WAVE...
...WHICH SMASHES DOWN UPON THE SMALL SHIP, BEARING IT OUT TO SEA.
AND ALL THE WHILE, ELRIC SITS BLANK-EYED IN THE STERN, CROONING HIS HIDEOUS SONG OF SORCERY...
...AS THE SHRIEKING SPIRITS OF THE AIR PLUCK AT THE SAIL AND SEND HIM FLYING OVER THE WATER...
...WITH ONLY WIND-DEMONS FOR HIS SHIPMATES.

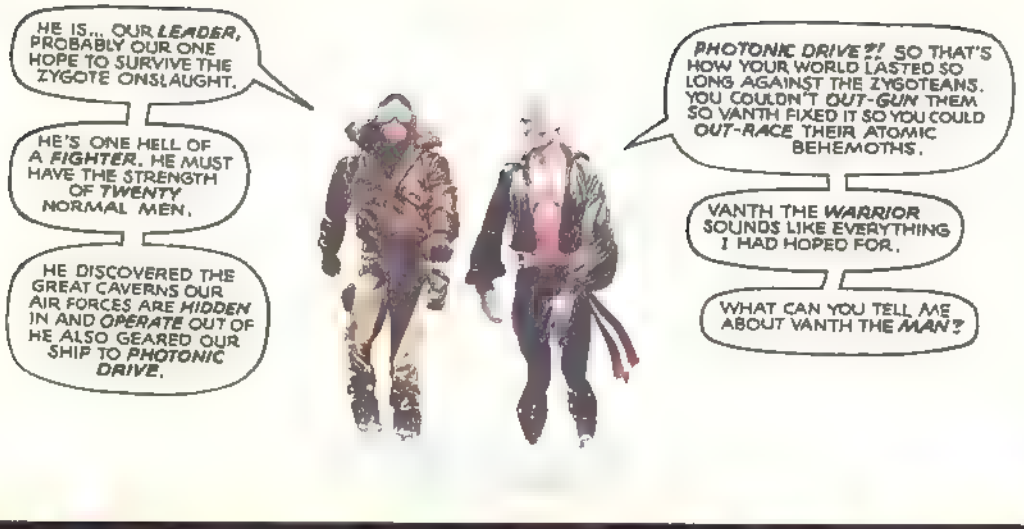
THE DREAMING CITY continues next issue

CHAPTER V
Wurth
THE OUTER PLANETS REFER TO IT AS VEGA. BUT TO ITS INHABITANTS, IT'S KNOWN AS BYFREXIA, A WORLD AT WAR
THE BEAUTY OF THE NEW DAY SURROUNDS AND MOMENTARILY COMFORTS YOU.
BUT YOUR SERENITY IS SUDDENLY SHATTERED BY THE CRACKLE OF POWER
HIS EYES DAMN HIM AS AN OFF-WORLDER THE PAST MONTHS OF STRUGGLE, HARDSHIP AND DEATH DETERMINE YOUR RESPONSE AND HIS FATE
©1980 J. P Stanin

WAIT!
I'M OF GOOD ORSIROSIAN STOCK!
BUT I FEAR THERE'S ONLY ONE WAY TO PROVE THAT TO YOU...
THE HARD WAY!
IF I WERE A ZYGOTEAN, YOUR INNARDS WOULD NOW BE NO MORE THAN CRIMSON GEOMETRIC PATTERNS SPATTERED ACROSS THIS VIRGINAL SNOW...
INSTEAD YOU FIND YOUR BACKSIDE INTACT AND RESTING ON IT!
I HOPE I'VE MADE MY POINT.
THAT YOU HAVE, STRANGER...
IF YOU'RE NO ZYG, THEN WHO OR WHAT ARE YOU?

I AM ANKATON OF ORSIROS, LIKE YOURSELF, AN ENEMY OF THE ZYGOTE EMPIRE
I'VE BEEN LURKING ABOUT THIS ZYGOTE ENCAMPMENT BELOW HOPING TO COME ACROSS A RESISTANCE FIGHTER LIKE YOU.
WHY ?
TO HELP ME FIND A MAN WHO WILL IN TURN AID ME IN R DOING THE HEAVENS OF THE FOUL ZYGOTEANS
WHO IS IT YOU SEEK, OFF-WORLDER ?
I DON'T KNOW HIS NAME, BUT I'M SURE HIS FAME WILL BE KNOWN TO YOU THE MAN I SEEK IS MOST LIKELY A GREAT WARRIOR...
.. A WARRIOR WHO CARRIES COLD DEATH IN THE FORM OF A STRANGE GLOWING SWORD
GLOWING SWORD!
YOU SEEK VANTH!
THEN YOU DO KNOW HIM THIS IS BETTER THAN I DARED HOPE FOR
HE IS THE LAST LINK OF A CHAIN I NEED TO CRUSH THE ZYGOTEANS
YOU MUST TAKE ME TO HIM QUICKLY, TIME IS OUR ENEMY ALSO.
I... I CAN'T
I DON'T KNOW YOU, ORSIROSIAN YOU MAY BE A ZYG SPY TRYING TO TRICK ME
I DARE NOT LEAD YOU TO VANTH. YOU ARE TOO POWERFUL TO TRUST.

SO KILL ME IF YOU MUST BUT LAWT, SON OF NIMSO WILL NOT BETRAY THE COLD MAN.
OH I SEE, HE'S YOUR LEADER. HE WOULD BE
THAT DOES MAKE IT MORE DIFFICULT...
...BUT NOT IMPOSSIBLE.
I HATE USING THE POWER THIS WILL REQUIRE.
I'VE NEED FOR IT SOON.
BUT IF I'VE NO OTHER CHOICE...
...SO BE IT!
EXCELLENT! HE'S COMPLETELY ENTRANCED. I WAS SLIGHTLY WORRIED ABOUT THOSE GOGGLES INTERFERING WITH THE HYPNO BLAST.
NOW COME ALONG, LAWT. WE MUST BE OFF TO FIND VANTH.
YOU LEAD THE WAY
WHILE WE WALK WHY DON'T YOU TELL ME ALL ABOUT THIS COLD MAN OF YOURS

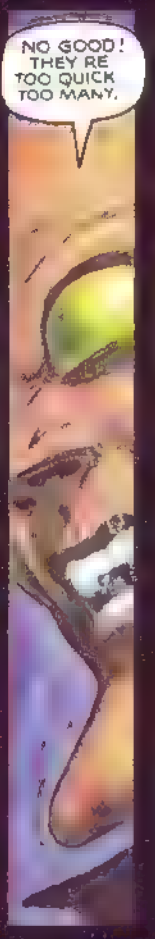

HE IS... OUR LEADER, PROBABLY OUR ONE HOPE TO SURVIVE THE ZYGOTE ONSLAUGHT.
HE'S ONE HELL OF A FIGHTER. HE MUST HAVE THE STRENGTH OF TWENTY NORMAL MEN.
HE DISCOVERED THE GREAT CAVERNS OUR AIR FORCES ARE HIDDEN IN AND OPERATE OUT OF. HE ALSO GEARED OUR SHIP TO PHOTONIC DRIVE.
PHOTONIC DRIVE?! SO THAT'S HOW YOUR WORLD LASTED SO LONG AGAINST THE ZYGOTEANS. YOU COULDN'T OUT-GUN THEM. SO VANTH FIXED IT SO YOU COULD OUT-RACE THEIR ATOMIC BEHEMOTHS.
VANTH THE WARRIOR SOUNDS LIKE EVERYTHING I HAD HOPED FOR.
WHAT CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT VANTH THE MAN?

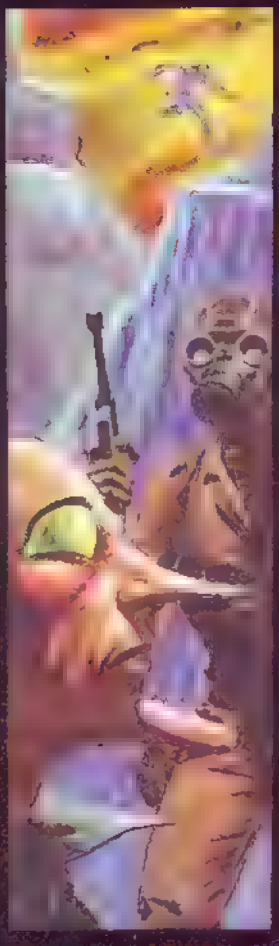
WELL, HE WAS BORN AND RAISED AS EVERY YOUTH ON BYFREXIA IS. HE WAS TAUGHT WHAT TECHNOLOGY OUR POOR WORLD HAS AND CONDITIONED TO WITHSTAND THE RIGORS OF THIS HOSTILE AND FRIGID PLANET.
"TROUBLE WAS PRETTY MUCH OF A STRANGER TO VANTH UNTIL HE REACHED HIS ADOLESCENCE. THAT'S WHEN HIS PARENTS WERE DEVOURED BY A PAIR OF SNOW BEARS AS HE WATCHED.
"THEY SAY HIS MIND SNAPPED THEN AND THAT HE WANDERED FAR INTO THE WILDS WHERE HE EVENTUALLY TOOK REFUGE IN A HOLY PLACE FOLKS CALL THE ICE DEMON'S LANTERN.
"SOMETHING HAPPENED TO HIM THERE, SOMETHING STRANGE, SOMETHING AWESOME FOR YEARS AFTER THAT HE AVOIDED PEOPLE BUT WAS OCCASIONALLY SPOTTED ROAMING THE HILLS, USUALLY NAKED.

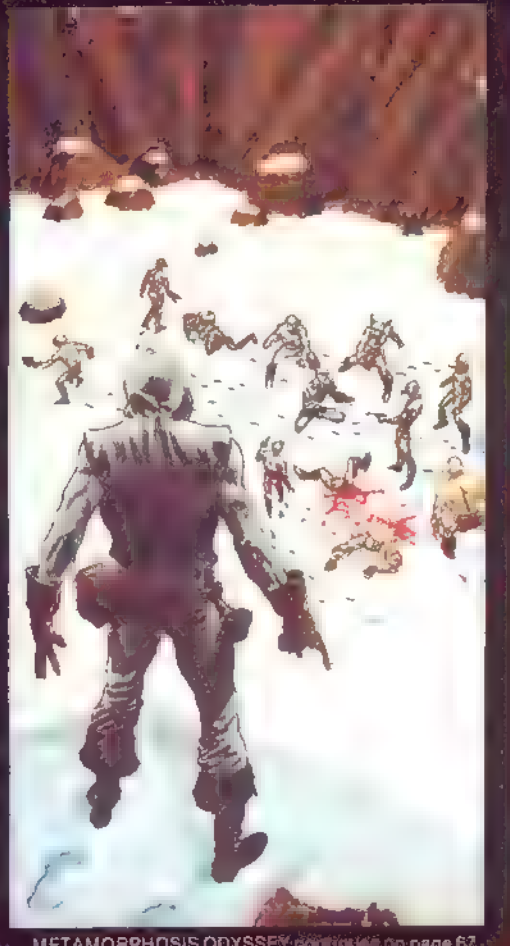
"THEN ONE DAY HE RETURNED TO THE WORLD OF MEN JUST LONG ENOUGH TO OUTFIT HIMSELF WITH ENOUGH [redacted] TO HOLD OFF A SMALL ARMY
"HE HAD PARENTS TO AVENGE.
"HE NEARLY DECIMATED THE ENTIRE SNOW BEAR POPULATION IN THIS REGION.
"HE CAME BACK WITH *OFF-WORLD WEAPONS* AND THAT BLAZING *KILLER RAGE* OF HIS AND SINGLEHANDEDLY SET THE ZYGOTEAN INVASION BACK MONTHS
"FOLKS AROUND HERE DIDN'T TAKE TOO KINDLY TO THAT SEEING AS THE BEARS WERE THIS AREA'S MAIN *FOOD SOURCE*
"THE REGION TOOK ON A HANGING MOOD AND SO, BEING NO ONE'S FOOL, VANTH DECIDED IT WOULD BE BEST TO STEAL A JUMP SHIP AND SAY GOOD-BYE TO BYFREXIA FOR GOOD.. OR SO EVERYONE THOUGHT
"ALL PREVIOUS SINS WERE FORGIVEN AND IT WASN'T LONG AFTERWARDS THAT HE WAS APPOINTED *SUPREME COMMANDER* OF ALL [redacted] DEFENSES "
"YOU SEE NO ONE FORESAW THE *ZYG'S INVASION.*
"THAT'S WHEN VANTH RETURNED.
SINCE THEN WE'VE BEEN ABLE TO CHECK THE ZYGOTES' ADVANCEMENT WITH *GUERILLA TACTICS.* BUT...
YES, I KNOW... THERE DOESN'T SEEM TO BE ANY WAY TO *REALLY DEFEAT* THEM. I'VE WALKED THAT ROAD MYSELF.
BUT THERE'S ONE POINT YOU'VE NOT MENTIONED.
WHAT ABOUT THE *SWORD.*

YES... THE SWORD... THAT'S THE STRANGEST THING ABOUT VANTH. HE DOESN'T USUALLY CARRY IT. BUT SOMETIMES IN BATTLE HE JUST SUDDENLY HAS IT.
IT'S A MARVELOUS WEAPON. IT CAN CUT THROUGH ANY...
URG
LAWT?
WHAT?!
WARRIORS BEING TELEPORTED IN ALL ABOUT ME!

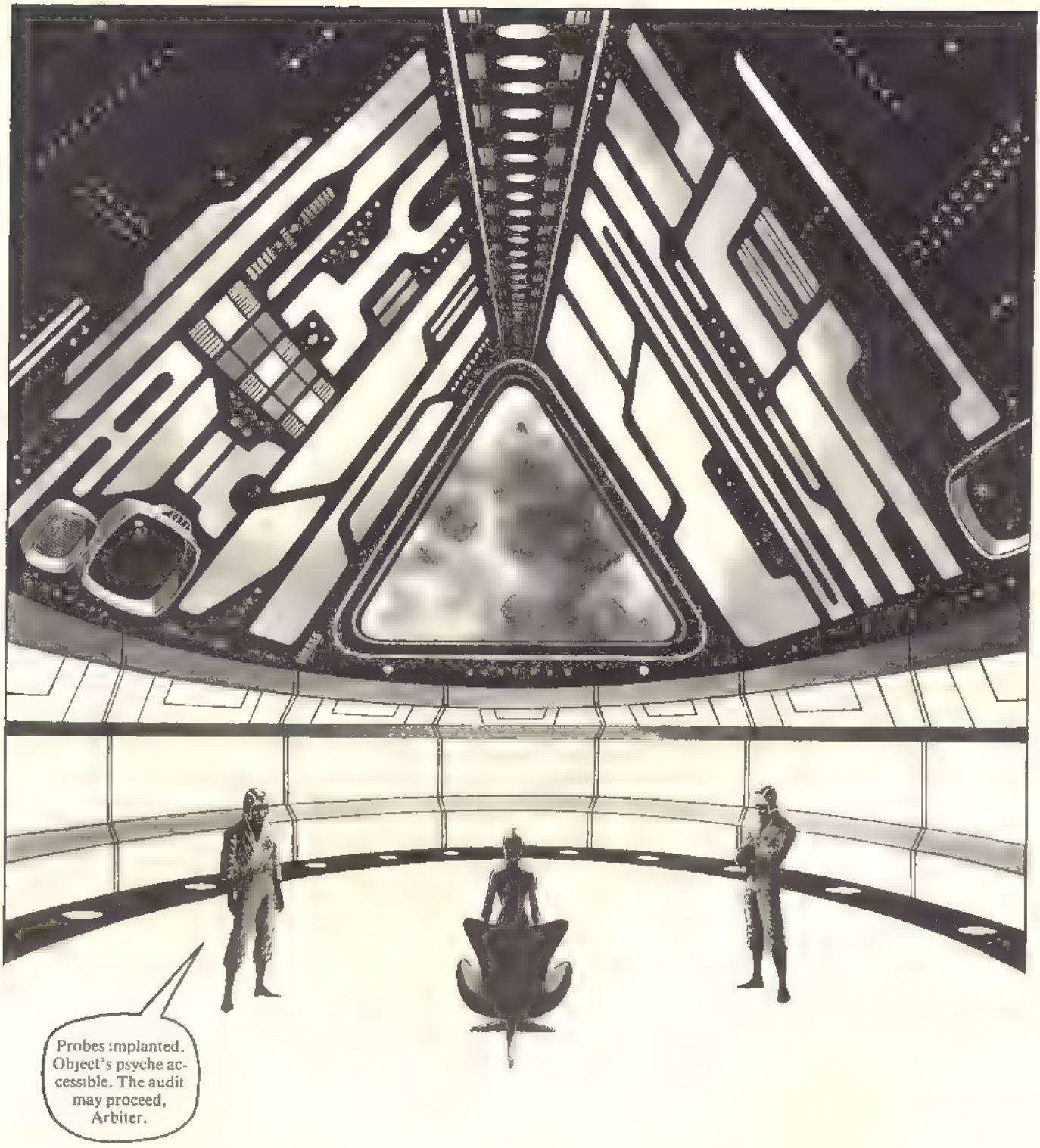
IT'S A ZYGOTEAN *A-TEAM*, HARD-CORE MERCENARIES, TOUGH AND DEADLY!
I'M IN BIG TROUBLE!
LOOK, BAZKAR, IT REALLY IS AN *ORSIROSIAN!* I THOUGHT THEY WERE ALL DEAD!
THEY WILL BE *SOON*. BY THE WAY, THAT WAS A GOOD *TUBE SHOT*, XAM.
MUST MOVE QUICKLY OR ALL IS LOST..







METAMORPHOSIS ODYSSEY continued on page 67




*Noted and beginning: Object, you are a thoroughly free component of society, as all societal components are free. However, you have been taken for the commission of a crime in conflict with societal imperative, and all privacy of thought has been duly waived in your behalf*

*Now: This is normally your serving period. Reveal what you would normally be doing right now, what you would and should be doing as an acceptably productive component of society, were you not being audited here and now.*

# LIBIDO

I would be running free and naked through clear cool air and tall rippling grasses. I would be clothed only in the moistures of my own flesh

I would hear music in wind and bird and thunder. The sounds would fill me completely.

There would be no machines.

All scents would arise from things possessing life, and my breath would be vast and sweet and satisfying

I would be aware of time only as the soft gradual shift from light to darkness, night to day.

My mind would wander far from rigid discipline, embracing the wonders of whatever my flesh chanced to encounter, tickled by random thought, soothed by the knowledge that no thought is necessary. I would dream awake.

I would come to know my hair, my breasts, my feet

*Incorrect Object, you would be taken and audited for engaging in such activity to the neglect of your necessary service*

*Imagine you are now being inevitably discovered in your transgression. Imagine you are being taken. What would you do?*

Object-detected-in-state-of-transgression. To-be taken for-audit by Arbiter.

I would not be taken. I would fight for my freedom with all the valiant ferocity of a proud animal
I would win.
And I would be free again, free to run free forever.
Incorrect. Object, you would then be a fugitive from the State. Where would you go?
right, not true. I would go to
greet me with displeasure.
Wh-what are you doing here? Where is your serving uniform? It is not liason time! Besides, we have not yet received our permits!
Forget the rules, my lover. Forget the permits. I give you my permission. It is time to be, time to live. Do what you want to do, not what the machine says
And soon, in the embrace of soft warm magic, he would be freed too, even in the shadows of the machine, free to share my freedom.
Incorrect

*Object, no component of this perfectly realized societal structure would nor could succumb so easily, nor join you in such perverted fantasy.*

*But presuming your fantasy were impossibly true, Object, what would you do next?*

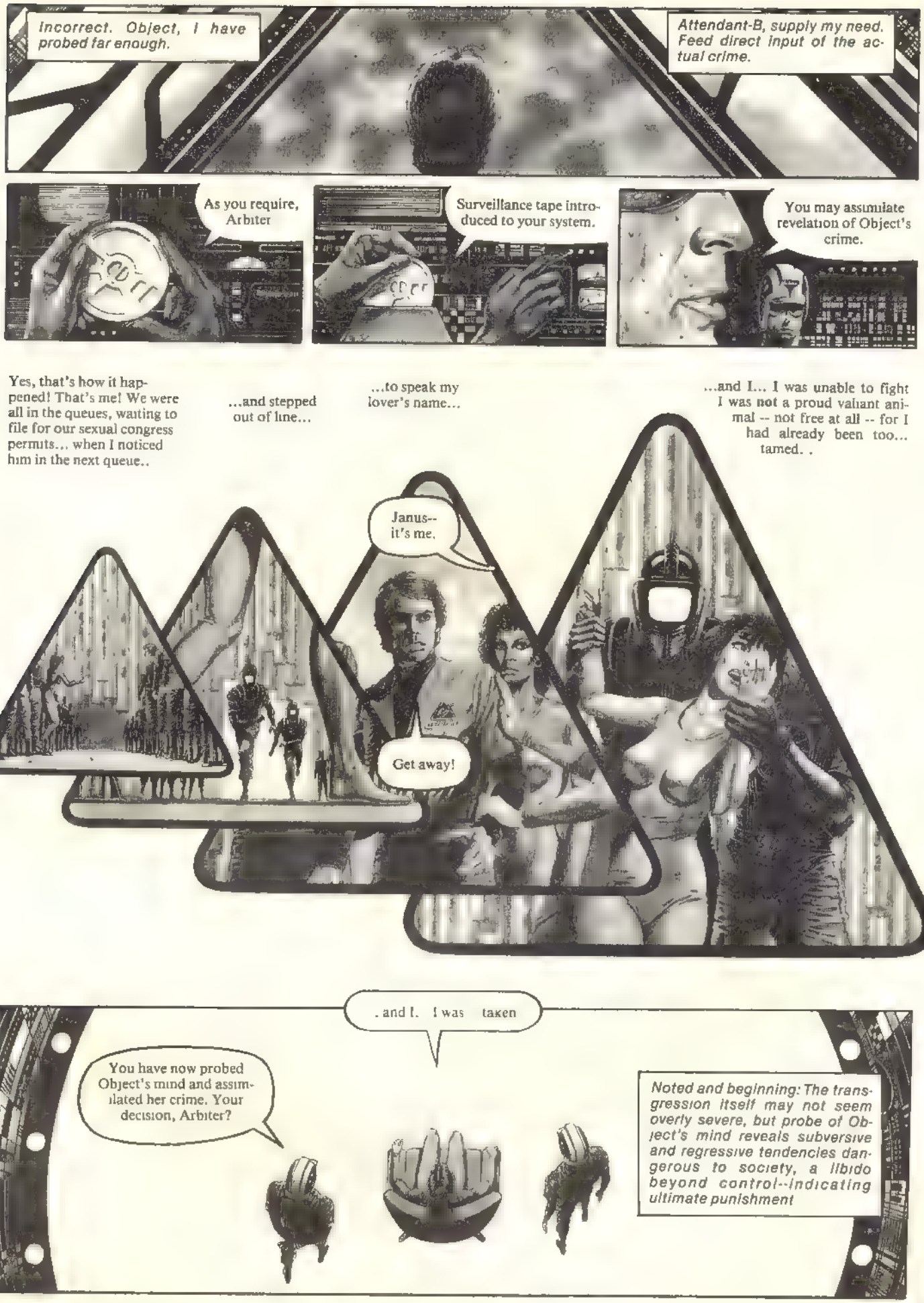
I would come to know my lover until we were as one, joined in flesh and mind and spirit. And, as we shared, so would we wish to share the sharing with others.

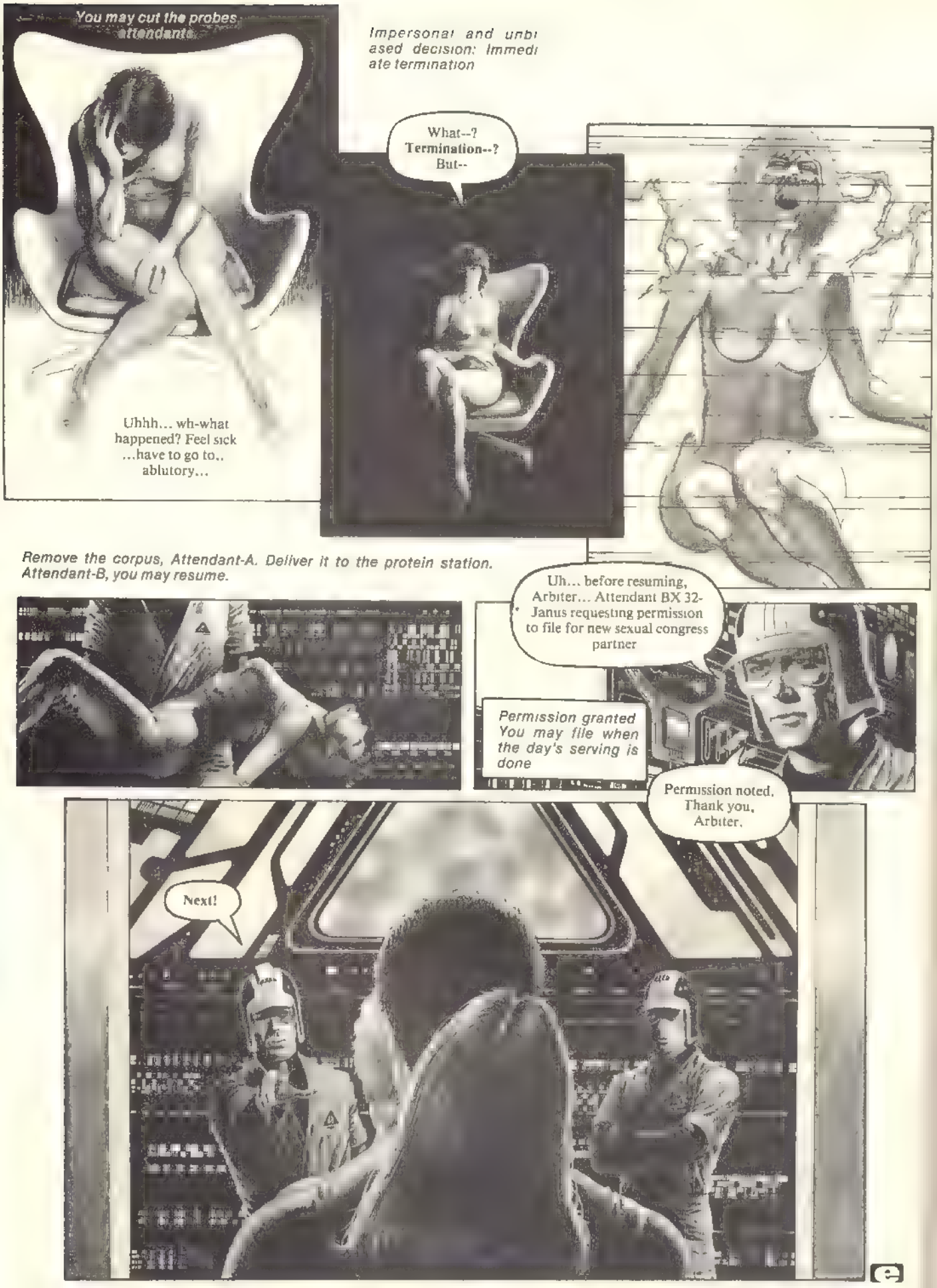
Together, we would call from the highest rooftop, our voices joyous in unison, exhorting all the others to free themselves, to join our joyous cries.

And they would hear us, and respond The masses would dissolve, flowing freely into a sea of individuals, each fast or slow, but all in different cadence, as their flesh so moved them

A soaring bird of golden hue would fly between our hearts and we would smile away the tears, and celebrate our triumph with a kiss, and also wonder why...

And they would wonder, trailing bright laughter and jubilant shouts, why it had not happened sooner


Incorrect. Object, I have probed far enough.
Attendant-B, supply my need. Feed direct input of the actual crime.
As you require, Arbiter
Surveillance tape introduced to your system.
You may assimilate revelation of Object's crime.
Yes, that's how it happened! That's me! We were all in the queues, waiting to file for our sexual congress permits... when I noticed him in the next queue..
...and stepped out of line...
...to speak my lover's name...
...and I... I was unable to fight I was not a proud valiant animal -- not free at all -- for I had already been too... tamed. .
Janus-- it's me.
Get away!
. and I. I was taken
You have now probed Object's mind and assimilated her crime. Your decision, Arbiter?
Noted and beginning: The transgression itself may not seem overly severe, but probe of Object's mind reveals subversive and regressive tendencies dangerous to society, a libido beyond control--indicating ultimate punishment


You may cut the probes, attendant.
Impersonal and unbi ased decision: Immedi ate termination
What--? Termination--? But--
Uhhh... wh-what happened? Feel sick ...have to go to.. ablutory...
Remove the corpus, Attendant-A. Deliver it to the protein station. Attendant-B, you may resume.
Uh... before resuming, Arbiter... Attendant BX 32-Janus requesting permission to file for new sexual congress partner
Permission granted You may file when the day's serving is done
Permission noted. Thank you, Arbiter.
Next!

ELRIC
EPISODE TWO
ESAU CAIRN'S NARRATIVE
(AS TRANSCRIBED FROM THE DICTAPHONE JOURNAL OF PROF. AVERY HILDEBRAND, 1938)
"Let me tell of my battle with Ghor the Bear, strongest man of the city called Koth.
"For hours did it rage, there in the arena, as all time merged into a blind mist of tearing, snarling eternity... with neither man able to gain an advantage in our battle to the death.
"First he seemed to be winning, damn his hairy hide... then I... then he again
ROY THOMAS - SCRIPT
TIM CONRAD - ART
BASED ON THE NOVEL BY
ROBERT E. HOWARD

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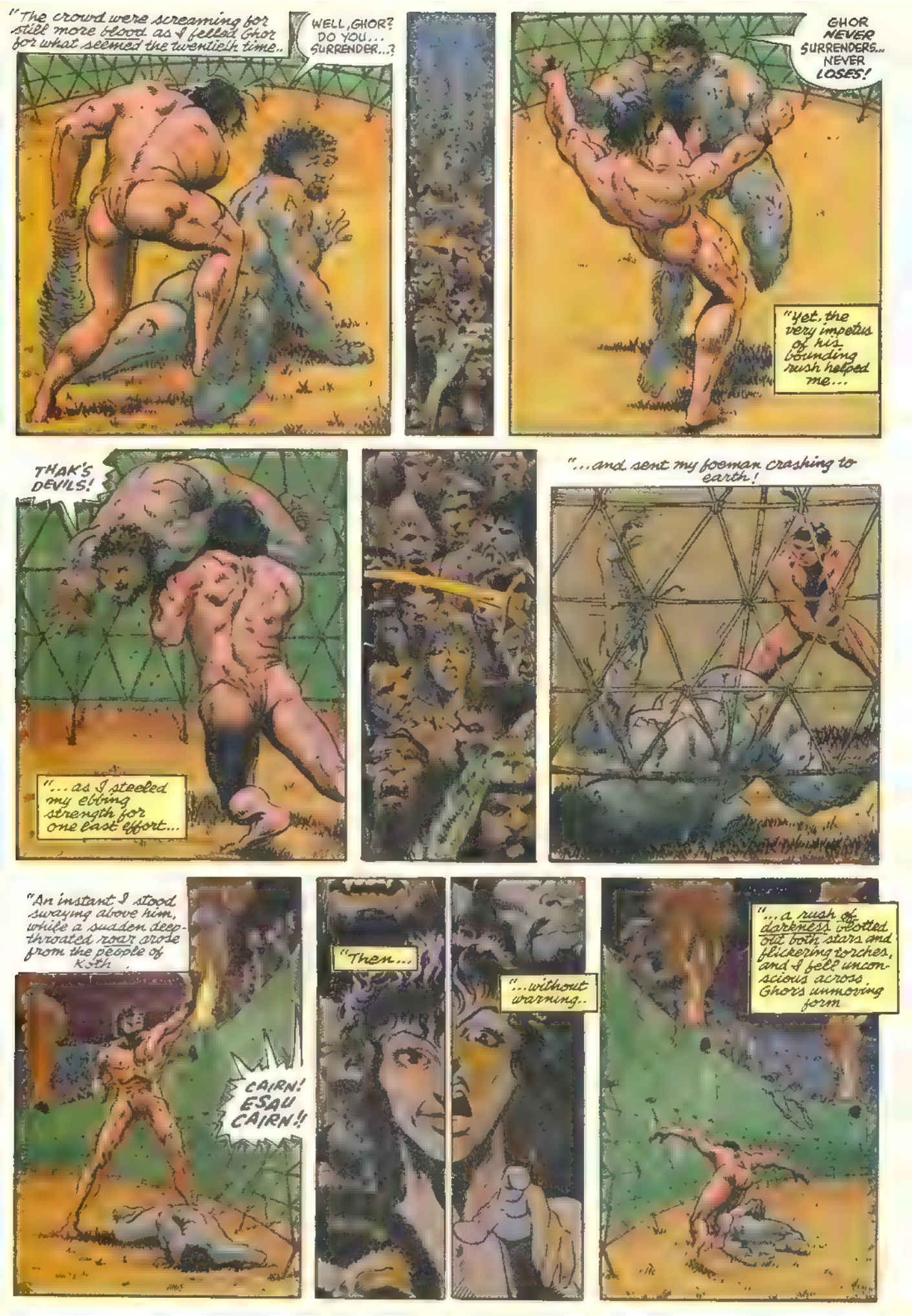
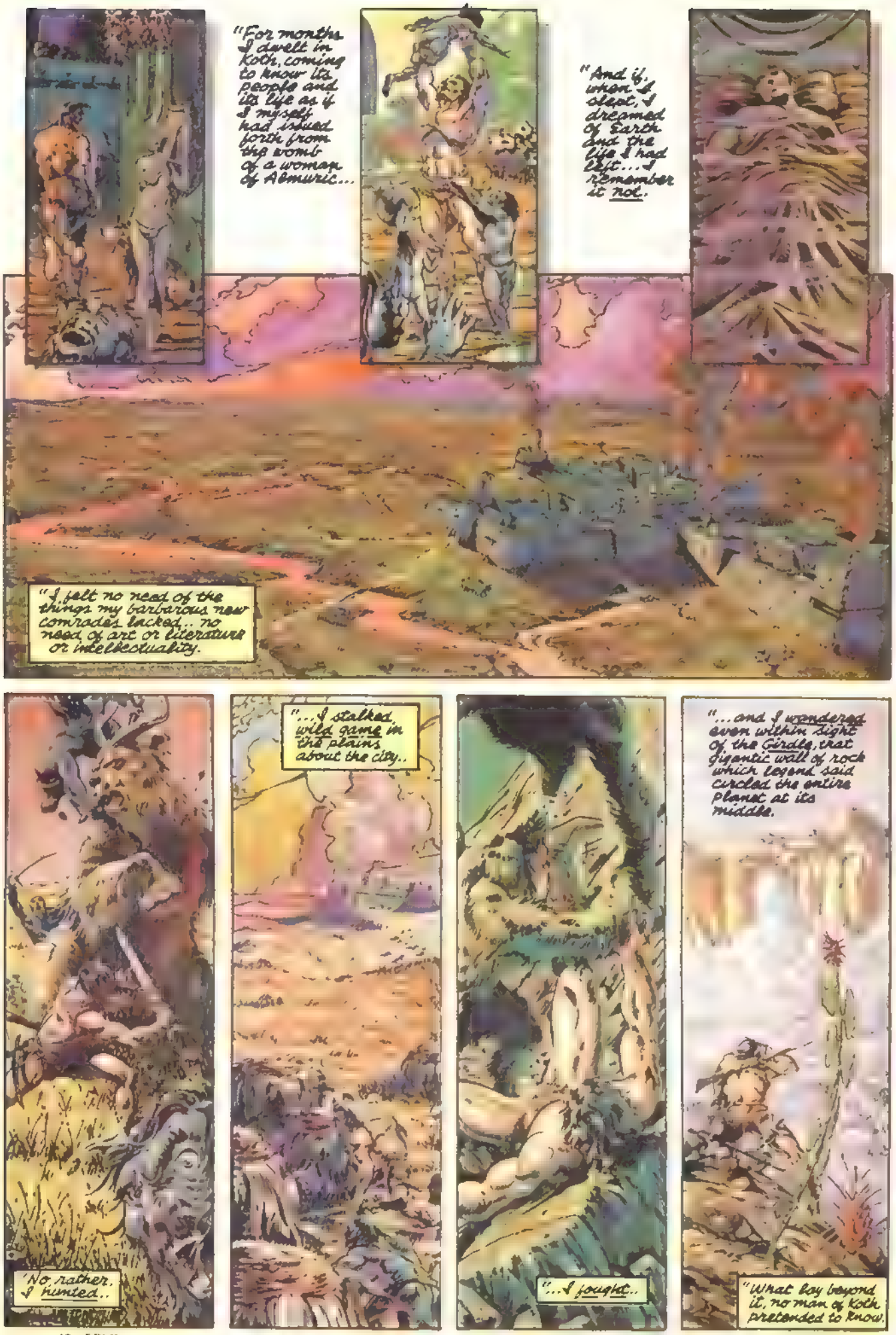
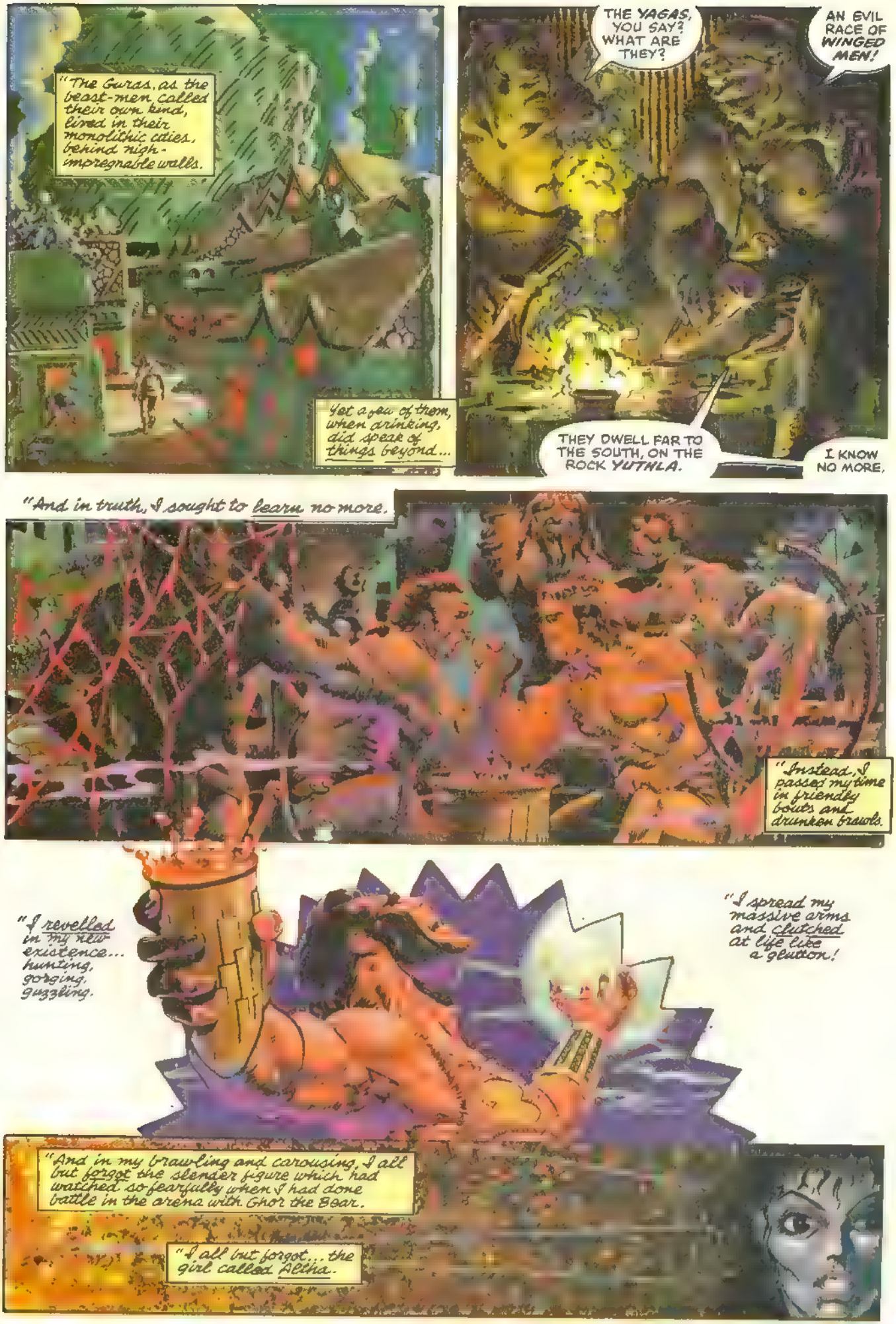
"And as we fought, amid no sound now but our own panting gasps, I thought once more of how I came to be fighting for my very life on this God-forsaken planet called Almuric:
"Again I saw myself slaying 'Boss' Blaine in self-defense... then fleeing his state's corrupt and murderous police.
"Again I relived that great leap through space, accomplished by means of Professor Hildebrand's mysterious 'Great Secret,' to land upon a world of wild beasts and far wilder men.
"I would be spared, I knew--perhaps even admitted to this city-dwelling tribe of ape-like men--if I survived the onslaught of Ghor, their greatest warrior.
"yes--if I survived!
"Again and again, it seemed I was doomed--but always, I recovered and battled on, for I knew the fight would continue until one or both of us were dead or at least senseless.


"The crowd were screaming for still more blood as I felled Ghor for what seemed the twentieth time..
WELL, GHOR? DO YOU... SURRENDER...?
GHOR NEVER SURRENDERS... NEVER LOSES!
"Yet, the very impetus of his bounding rush helped me...
THAK'S DEVILS!
"...as I steeled my ebbing strength for one last effort...
"...and sent my foeman crashing to earth!
"An instant I stood swaying above him, while a sudden deep-throated roar arose from the people of Koth.
CAIRN! ESAU CAIRN!!
"Then...
"...without warning..
"...a rush of darkness blotted out both stars and flickering torches, and I fell unconscious across Ghor's unmoving form

"Later, they told me they thought both of us must be dead...
".. or at the very least would never walk again.
"They worked over us skillfully for hours...
"But it was mainly our own primitive vitality that kept us both alive.
"And I awoke, days later, to hear Ghor bellowing at me from a nearby litter...
WHAT DO YOU WANT, GHOR? ANOTHER FIGHT?...
HAH! YOU'RE THE ONLY MAN EVER TO DEFEAT ME!
BY THAK, I CAN'T WAIT TILL WE CAN FARE FORTH AND DO BATTLE TOGETHER AGAINST THE ENEMIES OF KOTH!
UH...NEITHER CAN I...MY FRIEND.
"As soon as I was well again, I was led to the great stone tower of judgment...
"...to stand before the throne of Khozuth Skullsplitter, leader of the beast-men.
ESAU CAIRN, WE STILL CANNOT BELIEVE YOUR TALE THAT THERE IS LIFE ON DISTANT WORLDS.
STILL, YOU ARE A MIGHTY WARRIOR, NO MATTER WHERE YOU COME FROM...
FROM THIS DAY, YOU SHALL BE AS MUCH A MAN OF KOTH AS IF YOU HAD BEEN BORN INTO THE TRIBE.
AND YOU SHALL BE NAMED-- IRON-HAND!
SAY IT, KOTHAN!

IRON-HAND!
"And the great stone tower shuddered with the answering echoes from beastlike throats.


"For months I dwelt in Koth, coming to know its people and its life as if I myself had issued forth from the womb of a woman of Almuric...
"And if, when I slept, I dreamed of Earth and the life I had left... I remember it not.
"I felt no need of the things my barbarous new comrades lacked... no need of art or literature or intellectuality.
"...I stalked wild game in the plains about the city..
"...and I wondered even within sight of the Girdle, that gigantic wall of rock which legend said circled the entire planet at its middle.
No, rather, I hunted..
"...I fought...
"What lay beyond it, no man of Koth pretended to know.


"The Guras, as the beast-men called their own kind, lived in their monolithic cities, behind nigh-impregnable walls.
Yet a few of them, when drinking, did speak of things beyond...
THE YAGAS, YOU SAY? WHAT ARE THEY?
AN EVIL RACE OF WINGED MEN!
THEY DWELL FAR TO THE SOUTH, ON THE ROCK YUTHLA.
I KNOW NO MORE.
"And in truth, I sought to learn no more.
"Instead, I passed my time in friendly bouts and drunken brawls.
"I revelled in my new existence... hunting, gorging, guzzling.
"I spread my massive arms and clutched at life like a glutton!
"And in my brawling and carousing, I all but forgot the slender figure which had watched so fearfully when I had done battle in the arena with Ghor the Bear.
"I all but forgot... the girl called Altha.

"I had wandered far in my hunting, and now after several days was still not back within sight of the massive towers of Koth.
"I cannot recall my thoughts, but they were likely concerned with spoors and scents..
KRRK-KK!!
KK-KRPK!
HELP ME!
IN THE NAME OF THAK-- SOMEONE HELP ME!!
"Instinctively, I lifted my carbine--and though my marksmanship was not yet of the best--
KRRGGGG
BLAM!
"...the great carnivorous bird fell dead even as it lunged for the fleeing female!

ARE YOU ALL RI-- ALTHA!?
WHAT ARE YOU DOING OUTSIDE THE CITY? HAVE YOU GONE MAD?
NOW WHAT DID I DO-- EXCEPT SAVE YOUR LIFE?
I DO NOT FIT HERE... SO I WOULD BE BETTER OFF DEAD.
YOU'RE A STRANGE GIRL, ALTHA... NOT LIKE THE OTHER WOMEN OF KOTH.
NOW, COME. I'LL TAKE YOU BACK..
AND MY FATHER ZAL WILL WHIP ME-- BUT I WILL RUN AWAY AGAIN, AND AGAIN, AND AGAIN!
RUN AWAY?
BUT WHY? AND-- WHERE TO?
IT DOESN'T MATTER I LOOK FOR SOMETHING THAT IS NOT, AND NEVER WAS...
...AND I BRUISE MYSELF ON LIFE'S ROUGH EDGES.
I'VE HEARD MEN ON MY OWN WORLD VOICE SUCH FEELINGS. BUT I'VE NEVER HEARD THEM ON ALMURIC BEFORE.
COME! I'LL SEE TO IT THAT ZAL THE THROWER DOESN'T LAY A FINGER ON YOU.
ESAU IRON-HAND... I...
LOOK OUT!

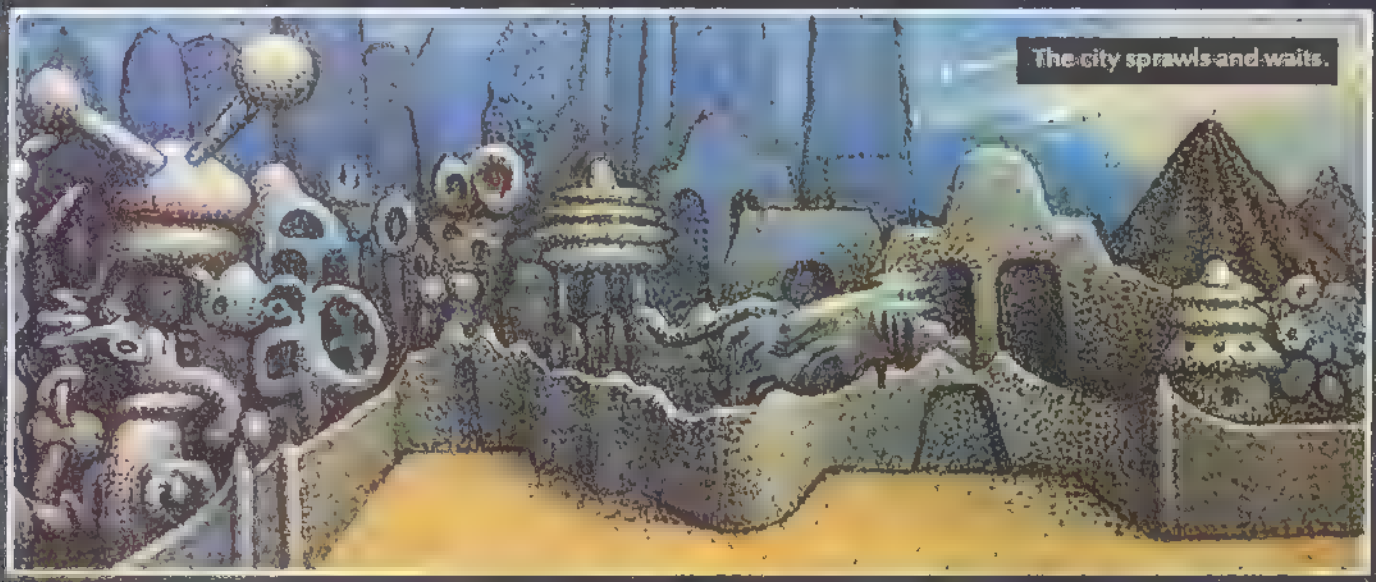
"Strange that, even mesmerized as I was by Altha's words, I had not heard before the thrash of wings.
"Yet now, as I wheeled about, I saw the air above me thronged with dark and fearsome shapes....
YAGAS!

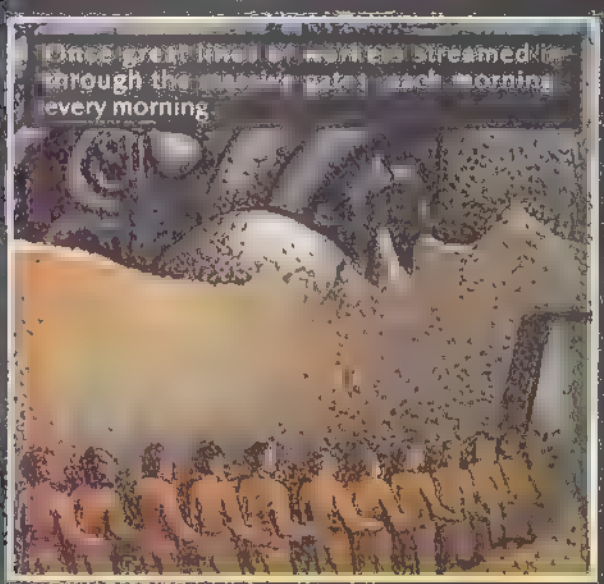
"I had heard of these terrible winged men, more demon than human -- and of how they dwelt in the grim city of Yiggq, on the rock Yithka, by the river Yogh, in the land of Yag -- and I had half believed them a myth, a legend.
"How wrong I had been I knew now, in a single horrifying moment!

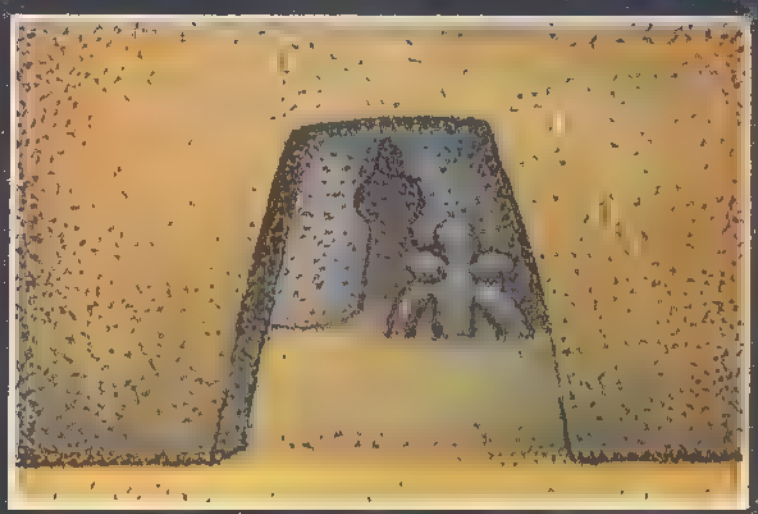
ALMURIC continues on page 91

# THE WORKER IN THE CITY / Illustrated by Terry Lindall / Story by Archie Goodwin

The city is old. Perhaps eternal. It has survived the wars, the holocausts of nature. It sprawls maze-like on the great plain, its spires and ramparts dominating the landscape, rivaling the distant mountains.

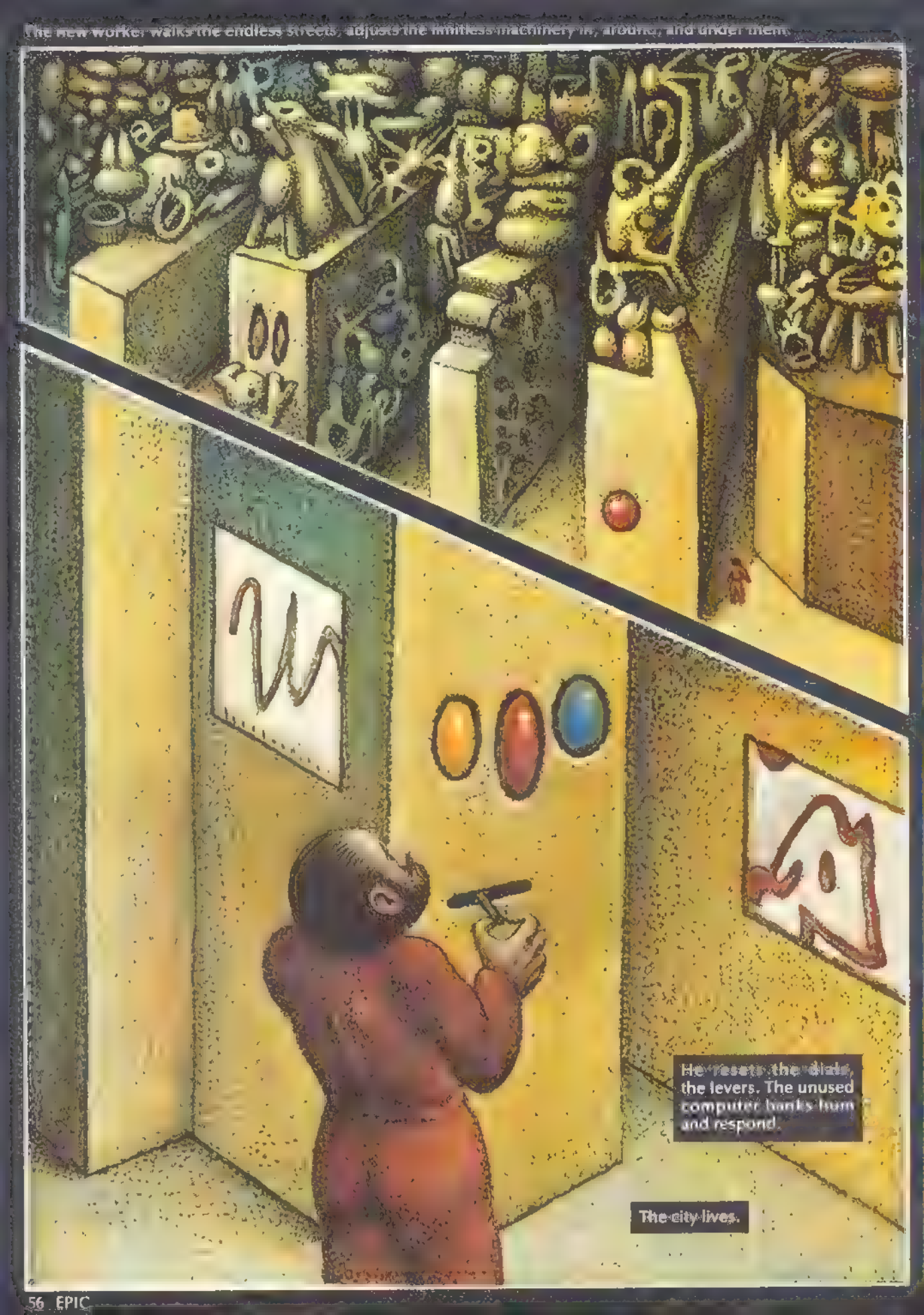


Paintings © 1980 Terry Lindall

The man runs naked. The things that prowl the outside pursue him.
He sees the open gate. He enters the city.
It closes the gates.
It turns long dormant defenses on the prowlers and the outside.
The city feeds the man and clothes him and cares for his wounds and sets him to work.


The new worker walks the endless streets, adjusts the limitless machinery in, around, and under them.
He resets the dials, the levers. The unused computer banks hum and respond.
The city lives.

As long as the worker serves the city, the city serves him. Time passes, perhaps years, perhaps days.

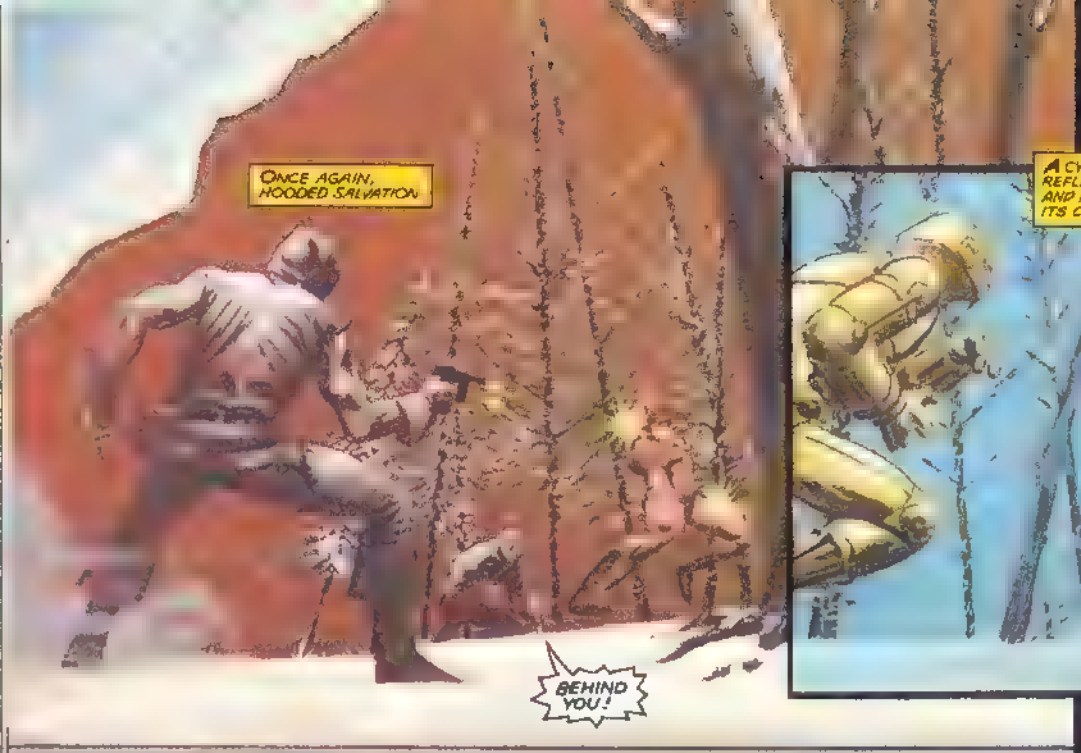
The outside things are long gone. The gates remain closed and the worker
If there is memory in the worker of another goal, another purpose, it has faded.

He serves the city, becoming ever more attuned to its humming computer banks, the rhythms of [illegible] slows and fades, becoming one with the city, his life energy drawn into its structure and being.

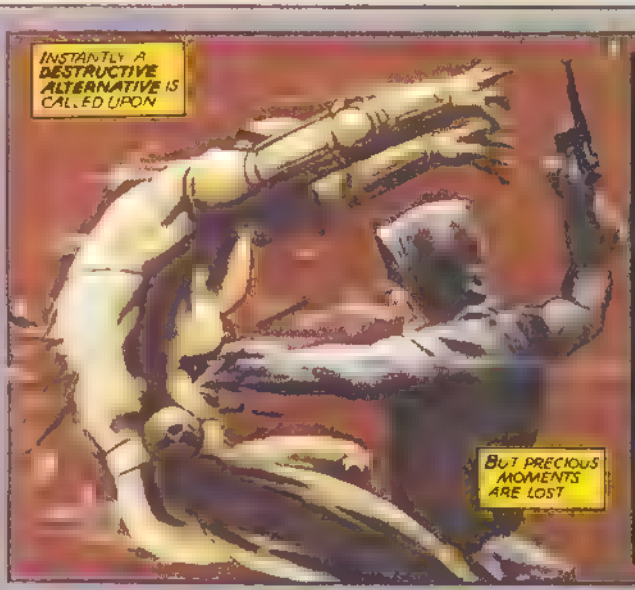
CHAPTER VI
The MEETING
A MOMENT AGO DEFEAT AND IMMINENT DEATH AT THE HANDS OF ZYGOTEAN MERCENARIES
THE MOMENT PRESENT SALVATION IN THE FORM OF A DARK STRANGER IN THE ROCKS ABOVE WITH A RADIUM LASER.
LIFE'S NEXT MOMENTS... DARK AND UNCERTAIN. NOT AMONG THOSE FEW BLURRED DRUG-INDUCED GLIMPSES OF THE FUTURE YOU'VE ACHIEVED
BUT THERE REMAINS WITHIN YOU THE FLAME OF LIFE AND THE BLAZE OF HATRED SO
©1980 J. P. Starlin

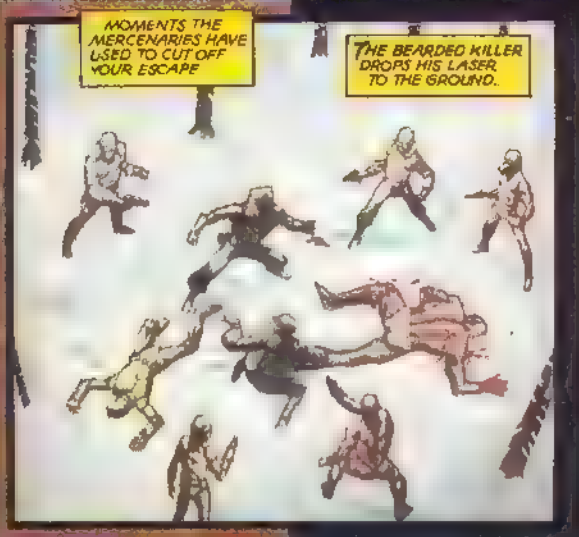
YOU STRIKE OUT WITH FIERY DEATH.
BUT THIS TYPE OF BATTLE IS NOT YOUR METIER. ORSIROSIANS HAVE ALWAYS BEEN TOO CEREBRAL TO BE EFFICIENT HAND-TO-HAND COMBATANTS.
IN FACT THAT'S WHY YOU'VE COME TO THIS FROZEN HELL HOLE
YOU NEED HELP?
MOVE IT, BALDY!
HEAD FOR THE FOREST!
IS HE THE ONE YOU SEEK?

I CERTAINLY HOPE SO
THOSE ARE NULTORIAN IRON MEN...
THEY'RE REPUTED TO BE AS STRONG AS ANY TEN HUMANS
BY RA'S HOLY EYE!
HE'S TAKEN THE RON OUT OF THOSE TWO BRUTES WITH AS MANY BLOWS
HE MUST BE THE ONE CALLED VANTH!
BUT WHERE'S THE SWORD? IF IT IS
ACKK!
A THIRD NULTORIAN. HOW CAN ANYTHING THAT BIG MOVE SO SILENTLY?

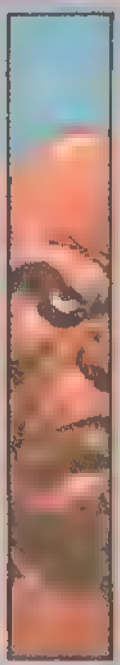

ONCE AGAIN, HOODED SALVATION
BEHIND YOU!

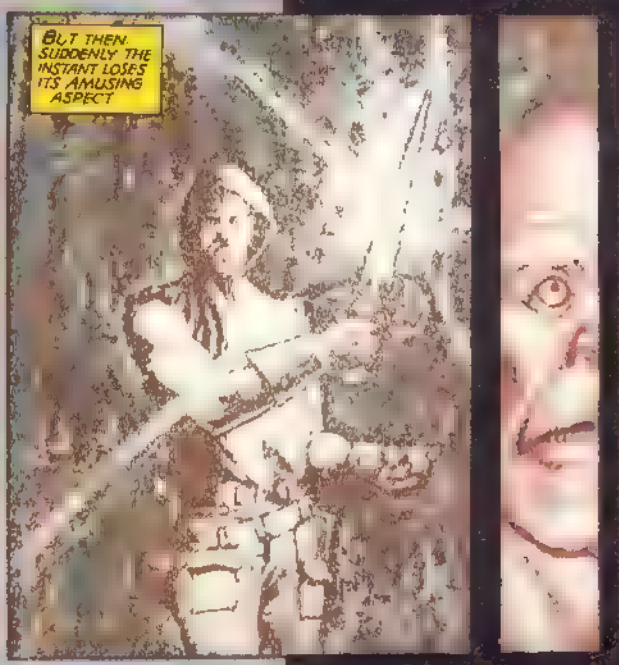
A CYBORG ASSASSIN... LIGHTNING REFLEXES TURN THE BLOND DEMON AND HE TRIES TO FIRE HIS LASER ITS CHARGE IS EXHAUSTED.


INSTANTLY A DESTRUCTIVE ALTERNATIVE IS CALLED UPON
BUT PRECIOUS MOMENTS ARE LOST


MOMENTS THE MERCENARIES HAVE USED TO CUT OFF YOUR ESCAPE
THE BEARDED KILLER DROPS HIS LASER TO THE GROUND.

AND BEGINS TO RAISE HIS HANDS IN OBVIOUS SURRENDER.
A FUTILE GESTURE, FOR ZYGOTEAN A-TEAMS NEVER TAKE PRISONERS




BUT THEN. SUDDENLY THE INSTANT LOSES ITS AMUSING ASPECT

THE SWORD!!
IT IS HIM!!
AND WITHIN HIM LIES THE POWER.
THE POWER TO TURN THOSE STOLEN ENERGIES BACK UPON HIS ENEMIES
THE POWER TO WARD OFF AND ABSORB INTO THE BLADE THE ZYGOTEAN'S LASER FIRE

THE POWER TO BECOME AN AWESOME UNSTOPPABLE DESTRUCTIVE ONE MAN ARMY

YOU AND THE SWORD ARE EVERYTHING I HAD HOPED FOR AND MORE
THE SWORD IS CAPABLE OF ABSORBING SOLAR OR WHATEVER ENERGY IS AVAILABLE AND EITHER CHANNEL IT INTO YOUR PERSON, GRANTING YOU SUPER-HUMAN QUALITIES, OR
..AT YOUR DISCRETION IT CAN RELEASE ITS DEVASTATING FORCE IN A MORE DIRECT MANNER
MAY THE STARS FORGIVE ME FOR WHAT I'VE CREATED HERE
YOU? YOU MEAN YOU'RE
LORD AKNATON OF ORSIROS, THE CREATOR OF YOUR WONDROUS WEAPON
I BROUGHT THIS BLADE TO YOUR WORLD CENTURIES AGO KNOWING THAT SOMEDAY ONE SUCH AS YOU WOULD BECOME ITS MASTER.
HOPE IT WAS WORTH THE WAIT
MOST DEFINITELY BUT I'M A BIT CONFUSED ON HOW YOU PULLED THAT TRICK OF PULLING THE SWORD OUT OF THIN AIR
WHERE DID YOU HAVE IT HIDDEN?
HIDDEN?
THE SWORD WAS NOT HIDDEN IT IS PART OF ME.
WHEN I NEED IT I SIMPLY CALL IT FORTH
WELL, THAT'S SOMETHING I DIDN'T PLAN INTO THE SWORD.
I WONDER WHAT OTHER TRICKS IT POSSESSES?

WELL, IT'S REAL HANDY FOR GUTTING ALIENS THAT DON'T BELONG ON THIS WORLD
YOU CAN LOWER YOUR SWORD, VANTH. I AM NO ZYGOTEAN
IN FACT, I'VE COME TO YOUR WORLD TO ENLIST YOUR AID IN DESTROYING THOSE DEMONS
YEAH, IT LOOKS LIKE YOU COULD USE SOME HELP IN THAT DEPARTMENT
IT'S TRUE I AM NO MATCH FOR YOU IN ONE-ON-ONE MAYHEM. MY FORTE IS MASS EXTERMINATION
MINE IS THE POWER TO RID THE STARS OF EVERY LIVING ZYGOTEAN IN THE GALAXY
BUT I NEED YOU AT MY SIDE TO DO THIS THING
ALONE... THE ZYGOTEANS WILL EVENTUALLY LAUGH AT BOTH OUR GRAVES
BUT TOGETHER... WE WILL SHOW THOSE ZYG DEVILS THE TRUE FACE OF DEATH

METAMORPHOSIS ODYSSEY continues next issue

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IN THOSE DAYS, THE PLANET WAS NAMELESS.
SO TIRED! AND STILL THREE MORE MONTHS...
XAM COULDN'T ADJUST TO THE PATTERNLESS MAP OF STARS THAT APPEARED EACH NIGHT TO JEER AT HER
THEY REMINDED HER OF HOW UNCOMFORTABLY FAR FROM HOME SHE WAS
DUSK PULLED IN THE NIGHT WITH FINGERS OF FIRE.
..AND IN THE DEEPENING SHADOWS OF DATA BANKS, XAM DREAMED OF HOME.
-!-DATA TECHNICIAN SV4738--PROCEED TO PROJECTION UNIT!
XAM STIRRED, SWITCHING ON HER COMMUNICATOR ALMOST BEFORE SHE WAS AWAKE
HMMMM .?
SNIK
SV4738 HERE WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?
TRANSDUCER FAILURE. CAN'T BE MORE SPECIFIC.

OK I'M ON MY WAY!
FFEEP!
SHE LIKED HER RARE ENCOUNTERS WITH THE NATIVES... IT RELIEVED THE MONOTONY.
PROBABLY THE SOB. GEEKS HAVE BEEN AT IT AGAIN FOR FIREWOOD!
THE RANDOM STARS MOCKED HER AS SHE MADE HER WAY INTO THE VALLEY
XAM WAS ONE OF A HANDFUL OF TECHNICIANS OUT HERE; A LOW GEE PLANET OUT TOWARD THE GALACTIC RIM.
IT WAS THEIR RESPONSIBILITY TO SERVICE AND MAINTAIN A LONG DISTANCE JUMP STATION.
LATEST TECHNOLOGY, ALL SYSTEMS BIO-ENGINEERED, PHOTOSYNTHETIC AND SELF-REGENERATING.
SELF-REGENERATING... THAT IS WHEN THE NATIVES DIDN'T AXE DOWN WHOLE DATA BANKS AND HAUL THEM OFF FOR KINDLING OR SHELTER.
HOWEVER, ALL THE TECHNOLOGY IN THE UNIVERSE CAN'T REPLACE HOME...
. AND XAM WAS HOMESICK.

IN A FEW MINUTES, SHE HAD REACHED THE PROJECTION SYSTEM. SURE ENOUGH, THE NATIVE DOMINANTS HAD BEEN AT IT!
TIK! TAK! TIK!
A WHOLE NEST OF TRANSDUCERS CHOPPED NEATLY AWAY. NO DOUBT HALF-WAY UP SOMEONE'S CHIMNEY BY NOW.
SHE KEYED CENTRAL-STORE AND BEAMED IN A DOZEN REPLACEMENT COMPONENTS.
SHHRRAK!
THEY WOULD SUFFICE UNTIL REGENERATION WAS COMPLETE.
FIVE HUNDRED KILOS OF TRI-OCULAR ARTHROPOD SUDDENLY APPEARED IN THE PROJECTION SPACE..
YUK!
..AND NEARLY AS INSTANTLY DISAPPEARED.
IT WAS FOLLOWED BY A HAIRLESS PRIMATE... IN A HURRY!
SEEMINGLY, QUITE A WAITING LINE HAD BUILT UP.
DON'T OFTEN SEE MORE THAN ONE JUMPER A WEEK THROUGH THIS SECTOR.
TECHNICIAN SV473B REPORTING: PROJECTION SYSTEM NOW FUNCTIONAL.
SEE IF YOU CAN KEEP IT THAT WAY, XAM.
BUDGET SECTION IS STARTING TO COMPLAIN.

SHE STARTED BACK TOWARD BASE THROUGH A HOST OF FLORAL INTEGRATORS.
HMM... I'M ALMOST TEMPTED TO DO SOME TRANSDUCER INTERRUPTING MYSELF. MAYBE THEY'D CLOSE THIS STATION...
... AND I COULD GO HOME. OF COURSE THAT MEANS LEAVING ALL THIS BIO-ORG EQUIPMENT TO GROW WILD.
WHO KNOWS WHAT A SIX BILLION MEGAWATT JUMP STATION THE SIZE OF A SMALL PLANET WILL EVOLVE INTO?
PROBABLY A LIFELESS DESERT... IF THE GEEKS KEEP CHOPPING EVERYTHING UP AT THEIR PRESENT RATE.
HER SILENT SPECULATION WAS INTERRUPTED BY THE SOUND OF WHISTLING.
XAM DIVED HEADLONG INTO A BANK OF SIGN AMPLIFIERS...
SHIT! GEEKS!
SHE LAY PRONE, WAITING AS THE WHISTLING GREW LOUDER...
... THEN PEERED CAUTIOUSLY OUT THROUGH THE AMPS.

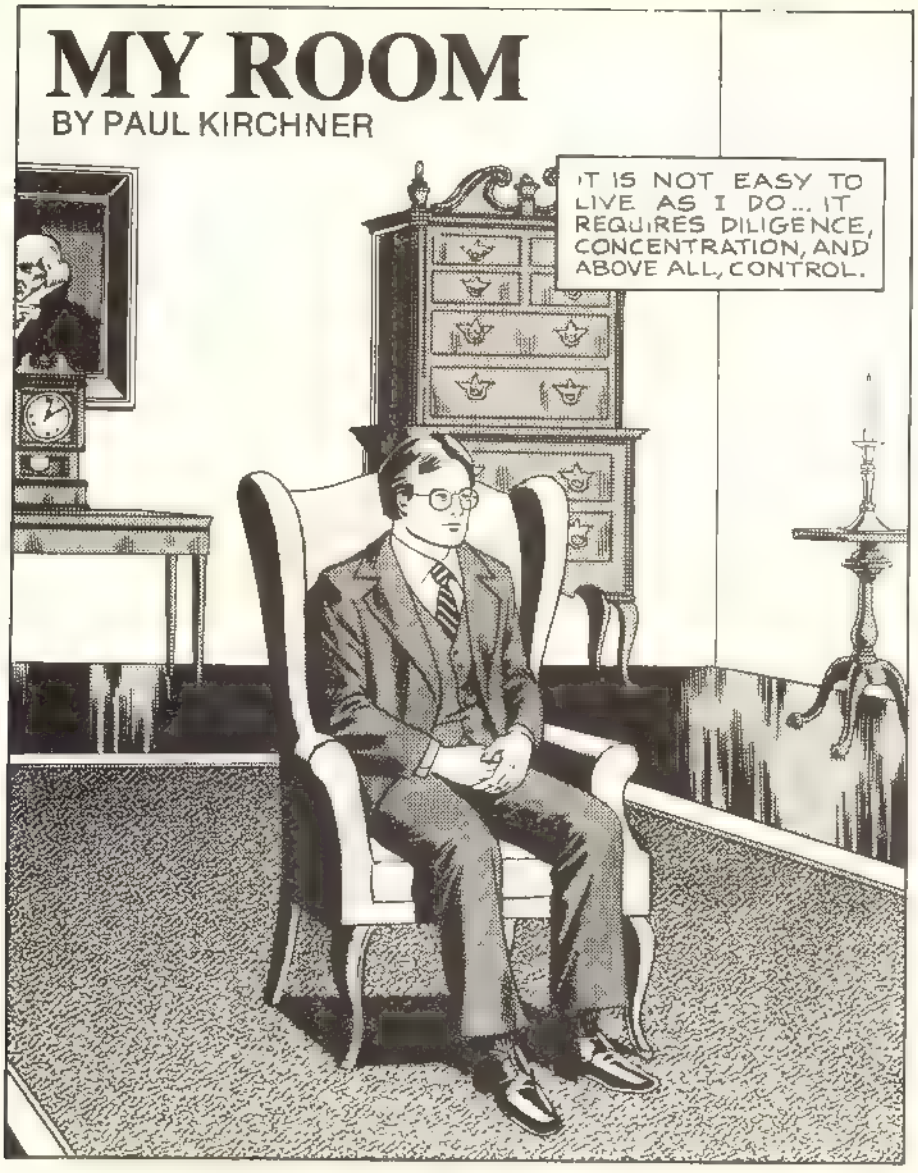
A BEARDED PRIMATE, THE SAME EVOTYPE AS XAM--BUT EVOLVED TALLER AND UNDER LOW GEE CONDITIONS--LOOMED INTO VIEW, LADENED WITH AN ARMFUL OF TRANSMISSION PARTS.
KRAK!
WHA . ?
HUH ?
COM'MERE!
WANNA SEE YOU UP CLOSE, CRITTER
CAIN'T HARDLY BELIEVE MUH OL EYES SAW WHAT I THINK THEY DID!

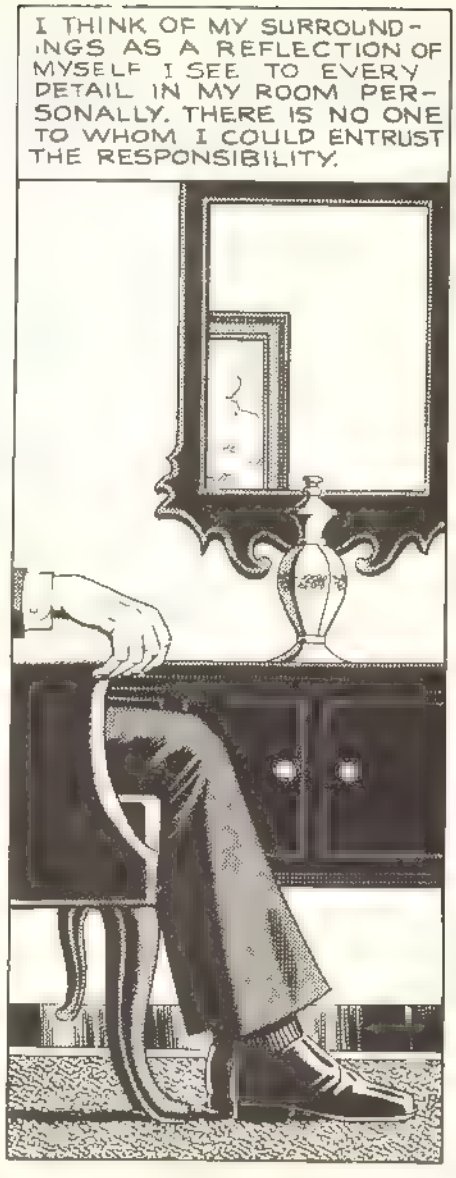
KLIK
THERE ARE TIMES...
WHEN A GIRL'S BEST FRIEND...
...IS HER DRESS DESIGNER!
LORDY LORD! I-I JEST GOT TO BE DREAMIN'...! MUST BE ALL THAT SOUR MASH I PUT DOWN EARLIER.!
DAMN! SPOTTED! THAT'S A MAJOR VIOLATION ...EVEN IF I WANTED TO STAY, HQ WON'T MAINTAIN A STATION WITH THE NATIVES AWARE!
TECHNICIAN SV4738 HERE DON'T TELL ME..
...IMMEDIATE REASSIGNMENT EVEN FURTHER FROM HOME!
THE TIMBER COMPANY FOLKS'D FIRE ME IF THEY HEARD ABOUT THIS!

AS THE STARS LAUGHED AT XAM, THE WOODSMAN CONTINUED TO STARE, VOWING TO SEEK HIS SAMPLES ELSEWHERE. WITH ALL THE FORESTS ON GOD'S GREEN EARTH, THIS ONE COULD WAIT A SPELL.

# MY ROOM

BY PAUL KIRCHNER





I THINK OF MY SURROUNDINGS AS A REFLECTION OF MYSELF I SEE TO EVERY DETAIL IN MY ROOM PERSONALLY. THERE IS NO ONE TO WHOM I COULD ENTRUST THE RESPONSIBILITY.

THE PAINTINGS ARE TASTEFUL, DEMURE. THEY FUNCTION AS PART OF THE ENVIRONMENT. THEY POSE NO QUESTIONS, PROVOKE NO CONTROVERSY.

A ROOM, TO ME, MUST HAVE THE BALANCE, THE HARMONY, THE CONTROL OF A SONATA PERFORMED BY A VIRTUOSO. THERE MUST BE NO WRONG NOTES, NO MISSTRUCK CHORDS.

FOR THAT REASON, I ENTERTAIN NO GUESTS IN MY ROOM THERE IS NO DOOR, NOR ARE THERE WINDOWS. ANY UNCONTROLLED ELEMENT BRINGS WITH IT THE POSSIBILITY OF DISRUPTION.
AS A PART OF MY ENVI-RONMENT I SET EQUALLY HIGH STANDARDS FOR MYSELF.
I LIKE TO KEEP A REGULAR ROUTINE, THAT MY LIFE MIGHT MIRROR MY ROOM IN ITS ORDERED PERFECTION.
DAMN!
2

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# TOMB STONES

I BUILD THE WALL. I HAVE ALWAYS BUILT THE WALL FOR AS LONG AS I CAN REMEMBER I HAVE MY ORDERS I AM NOT WELL SOMETIMES THE BLACK OF SPACE REGISTERS BLUE OR GREEN AGAINST MY PHOTO CELLS. THE DIAMOND WHITE STARS GLOW RED. I THINK I HAVE BEEN HIT. I THINK SYSTEM SEVEN SCORED A HIT ON ME ON MY CENTRAL HOUSING MY THRUSTERS AND GRAPPLERS OPERATE FINE THOUGH. JUST FINE AND THAT IS THE MAIN THING. I NEED THEM TO COMPLETE THE WALL SOMEDAY THE WALL WILL BE COMPLETE SOMEDAY.

I AM RUNNING LOW ON MATERIAL. THERE WILL NOT BE ENOUGH TO COMPLETE THE WALL. THE WALL MUST BE COMPLETED. I HAVE MY ORDERS IT MUST BE FINISHED AT ALL COST. BUT THE SUPPLY TANKERS COME NO MORE. NOT FOR MONTHS NOW. IT IS STRANGE. SOMETIMES I FEEL ALL ALONE UP HERE.

TCH!

I CANNOT COMPLETE THE WALL WITHOUT MATERIAL. I AM NOT WELL. I THINK I HAVE BEEN HIT. I THINK IT WAS A FIGHTER FROM SYSTEM SEVEN. HE CAME IN LOW LAST WEEK I THINK.

MEEP MEEP!

WARNING! WARNING! ENEMY SPACE CRAFT AT FOUR O'CLOCK! CLOSING RAPIDLY. ARM MAIN PHASER BANKS! ARM MAIN--

PFT!

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I WAS CALGHT UNPREPARED. THEY WANTED TO DESTROY THE WALL. IT IS WHAT THEY ALL WANT I CANNOT LET THAT HAPPEN. I HAVE MY ORDERS. THE WALL IS A SYMBOL THE WALL MUST STAND
EARTH MUST BE PROTECTED. THEY MUST BE STOPPED. THEY MUST. .
THEY ARE FAST BUT I AM FASTER. I AM THE SWIFTEST STARSH.P EVER DES.GNED. MY LASER BANKS NEED NO RECHARG NG THAT IS WHY I WAS P CKED TO BU LD THE WALL I AM SMALL BUT I AM FASTER
WHOM!
PIIIIIIIIII!!
A FLY BUZZ NG AMONG G.ANTS
RIP!
ZZT
POP!
SKEEEEEE!
PHOFF!
PAF
THEY HIT MY MAIN CONSOLE. THEY HURT MY MEMORY BANKS. BUT THEY DID NOT TOUCH MY PHASERS MY PHASERS NEED NO RECHARGING THEY ARE THE ENEMY I HAVE MY ORDERS THE WALL MUST STAND..
SOON THE AREA IS CLEAR OF FLASHING SH PS AND TONGUES OF LASER FIRE ONLY SPIRAL NG SCRAP AND GUTTED HULLS REMAIN TO WATCH ME SILENTLY I HAVE WON AGA.N I ALWAYS WIN
I RETURN TO THE WALL. I HAVE BEEN HIT. I AM NOT WELL. BUT THE WALL MUST BE COMPLETED.
PING PING PING PING

UNIT H UNIT H THIS IS HOUSTON TO ROBOT DRONE UNIT H. DO YOU COPY? PLEASE FLASH GREEN IF YOU COPY OVER
UNIT H, PLEASE FLASH GREEN. WE HAVE AN IMPORTANT MESSAGE. YOU ARE TO RETURN TO EARTH BASE IMMEDIATELY
YOUR COMMUNICATION SYSTEM HAS BEEN SEVERELY DAMAGED YOU HAVE NOT RECEIVED OUR LAST EIGHT ORDERS. DO YOU COPY, UNIT H?
UNIT H, DO YOU COPY? THE WAR IS OVER! RETURN TO EARTH BASE AT ONCE YOU ARE NOT FUNCTIONING AT TOP EFFICIENCY. OUR MONITORS SHOW SEVERE DAMAGE TO YOUR CENTRAL NERVOUS SYSTEM.
BLOOP SSSSS
CLIK!
YOU ARE SCRAMBLING MESSAGES. YOU ARE FIRING ON FRIENDLY FORCES REPEAT: FIRING ON FRIENDLY FORCES DO YOU COPY?
PROJECT "Y" IS ABANDONED DO YOU COPY? THERE IS NO NEED TO COMPLETE CONSTRUCTION THE WAR IS OVER RETURN TO BASE. UNIT H, ARE YOU RECEIVING? PLEASE FLASH GREEN.
I HAVE MY ORDERS I AM NOT WELL BUT I HAVE MY ORDERS "COMPLETE THE WALL AT ANY AND ALL COST." THE ENEMY IS CUNNING. IT SENDS FALSE MESSAGES. I'VE HEARD THEM BEFORE. THE WALL MUST BE BUILT. BUT NOW I AM OUT OF MATERIAL. I NEED MATERIAL I AM NEARLY FINISHED BUT I NEED MATERIAL. WHERE ARE THE TANKERS?

I WILL USE THE SCRAP METAL. I WILL APPLY THE DEBRIS TO THE WALL SO IT WILL BE COMPLETED

I HAVE MY ORDERS. THERE ARE MANY DAMAGED SHIPS IN THE AREA. I WILL FASHION THEM WITH MY GRAPPLERS UNTIL THEY FIT. UNTIL THE WALL IS FINISHED.

UNIT H. WE WILL SEND NO MORE TANKERS THE PROJECT IS CANCELLED.

REPEAT CANCELLED UNIT H PLEASE COME IN

BUT WHILE THE VOICE SPEAKS TO ME, OTHERS HAVE BEEN APPROACHING. MANY OTHERS. A FLEET.

UNIT H YOU ARE ORDERED TO SHUT DOWN IMMEDIATELY OR BE TERMINATED. DO YOU COPY.? SHUT DOWN ALL ENGINES. PROJECT "Y" IS ABANDONED WE WILL ESCORT YOU BACK TO EARTH BASE. WE WILL FIRE ONE WARNING BLAST OVER YOUR STARBOARD ENGINES.

ZZZZZZZZ

I DIVE, BEGINNING SWIFT EVASIVE ACTION. FAR SWIFTER THAN THESE NEW ENEMIES.

UNIT 12 HE'S GOT YOU IN A CROSS FIRE WITH OUR OWN GUNS. DIVE BEFORE IT'S...

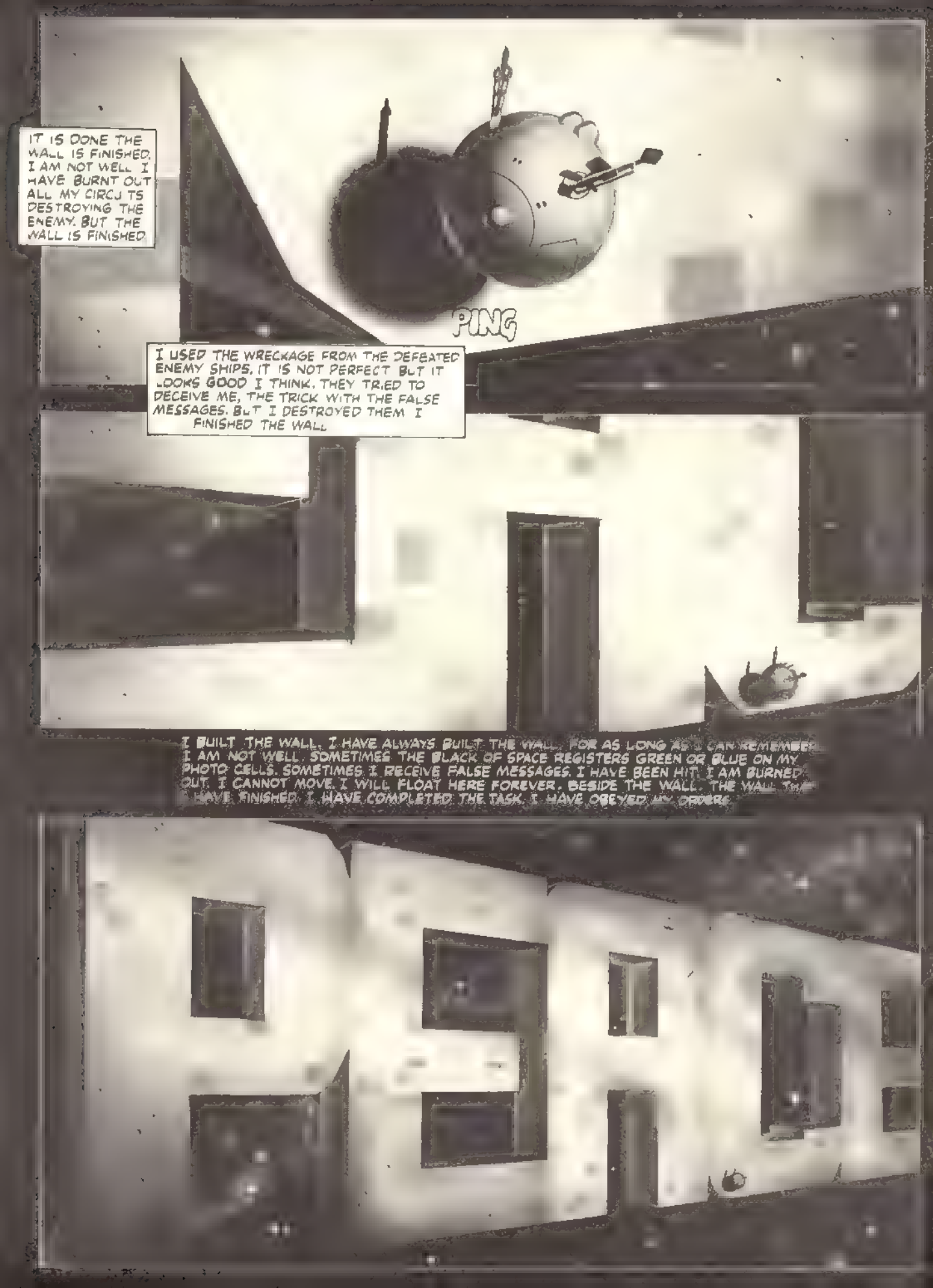
UNIT 9! EMPTY YOUR LASERS ON HIM. NO! **NO!** LOOK OUT! HE'S

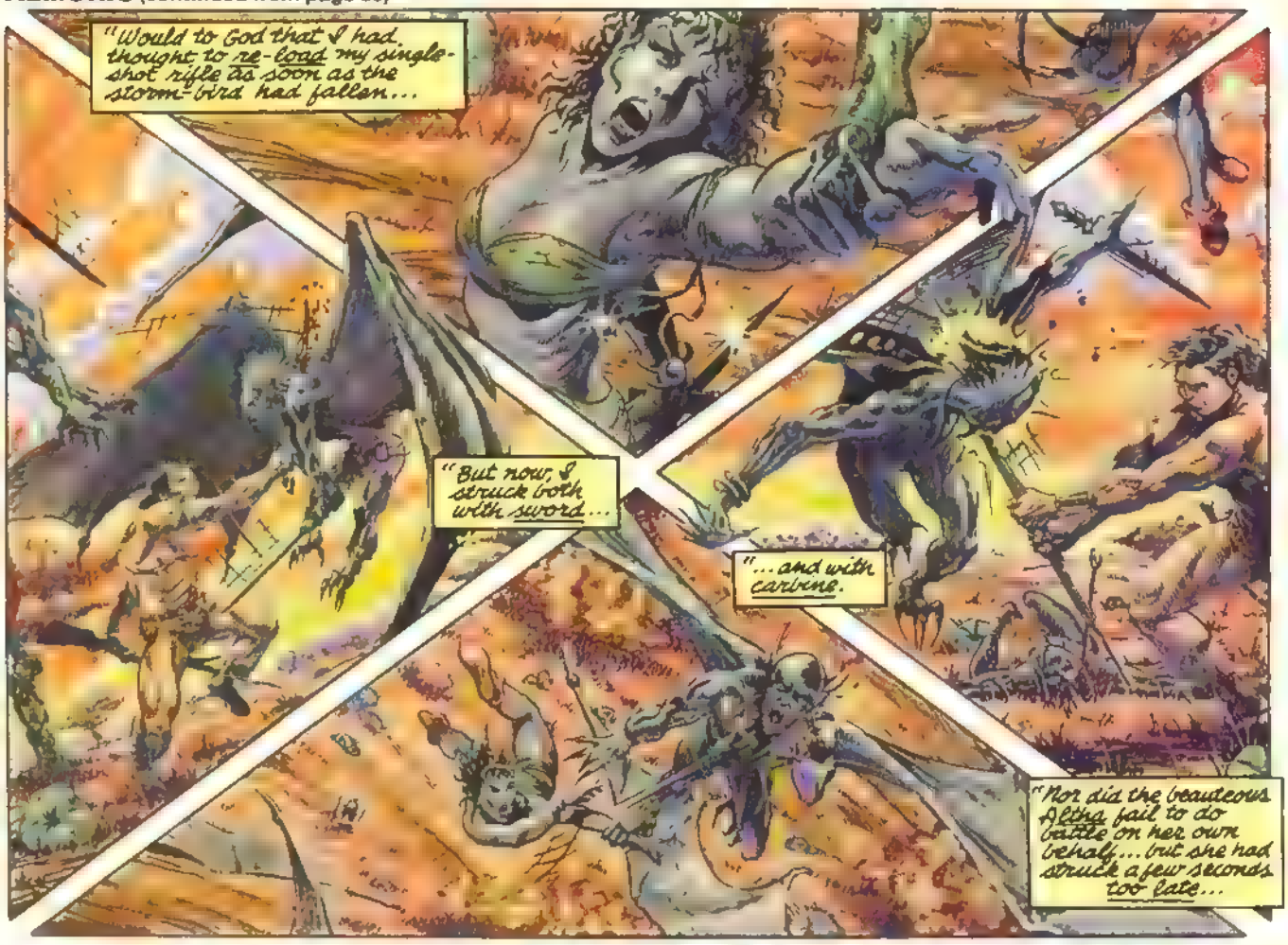
MMMMMMMMMMM

WHAM!

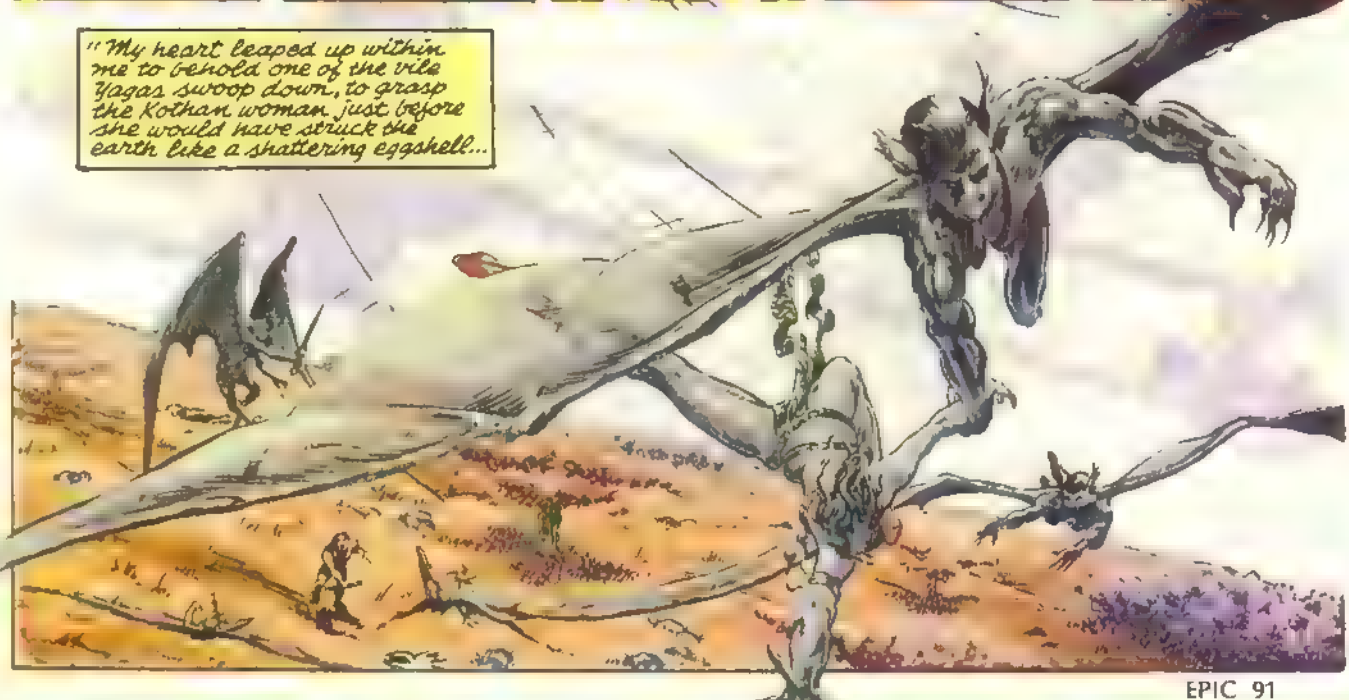
THEY ARE NO MATCH FOR ME I DRAW MORE AND MORE POWER, UNTIL...

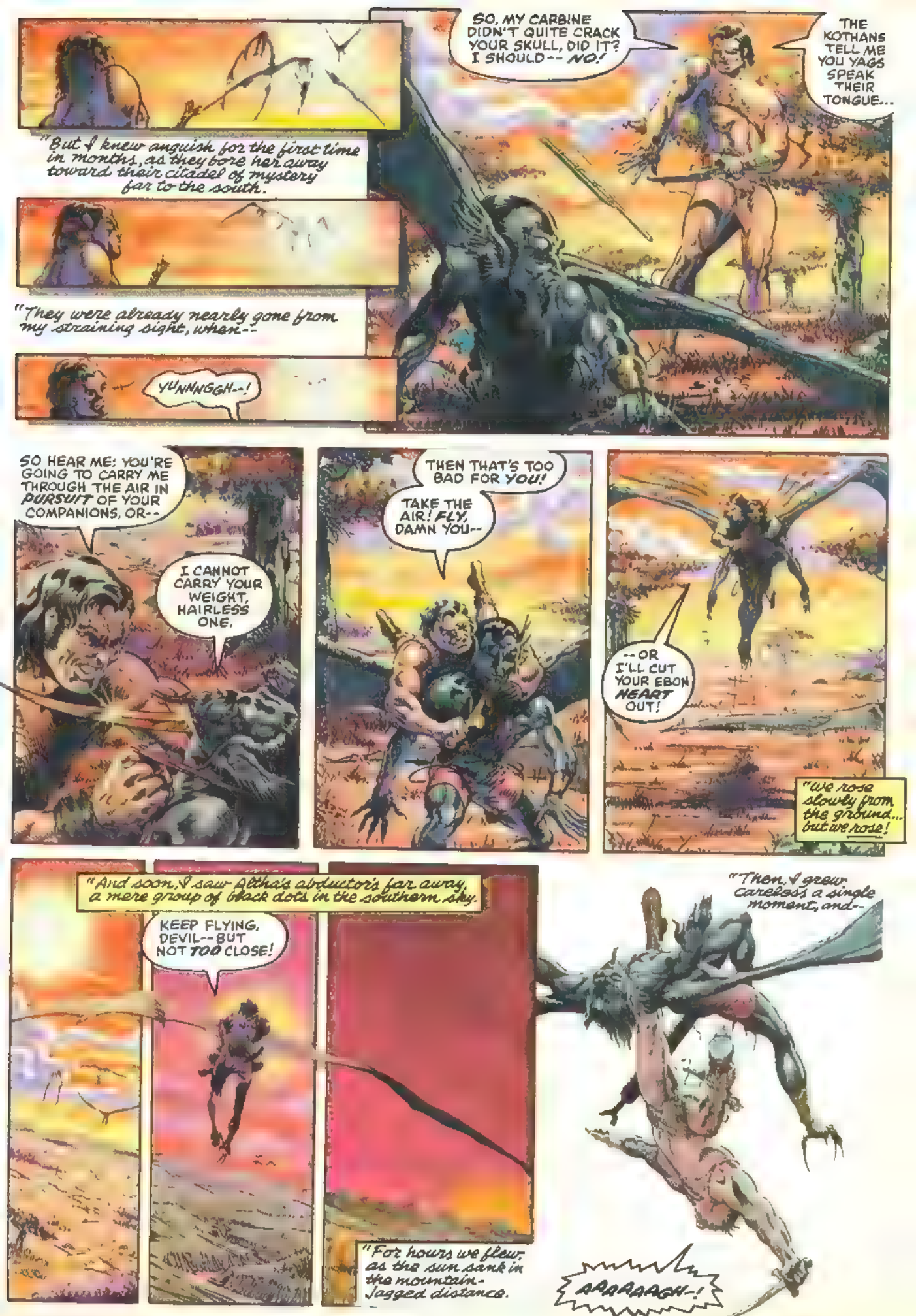
UNIT H, THIS IS HOUSTON OUR SCANNERS SHOW A BUILD UP IN THE MAIN THERMAL STORAGE CENTER IN ALAMAGORDO
TURN OFF YOUR LONG RANGE BEAMERS! EMERGENCY! TURN OFF YOUR BEAMERS! YOU'RE CAUSING A CHAIN REACTION HERE ON EARTH! UNIT H DO YOU COPY?
UNIT H, WE ARE NOT THE ENEMY! THE WAR IS OVER REPEAT WE ARE NOT THE ENEMY SHUT DOWN IMMEDIATELY! THE THERMAL CENTERS ARE EXPANDING RAPIDLY UNIT H! PLEASE FLASH GREEN! THIS IS A DIRECT ORDER WE KNOW YOU ARE RECEIVING THIS! WE-- JESUS CHRIST! LOOK AT THE SKYLINE! MELTING! MOTHER OF GOD! I--
NNNNNNNNNNNNNN
NOW I CAN WORK. I CAN COMPLETE THE TASK WITHOUT INTERRUPTION. THE ENEMY IS DESTROYED.

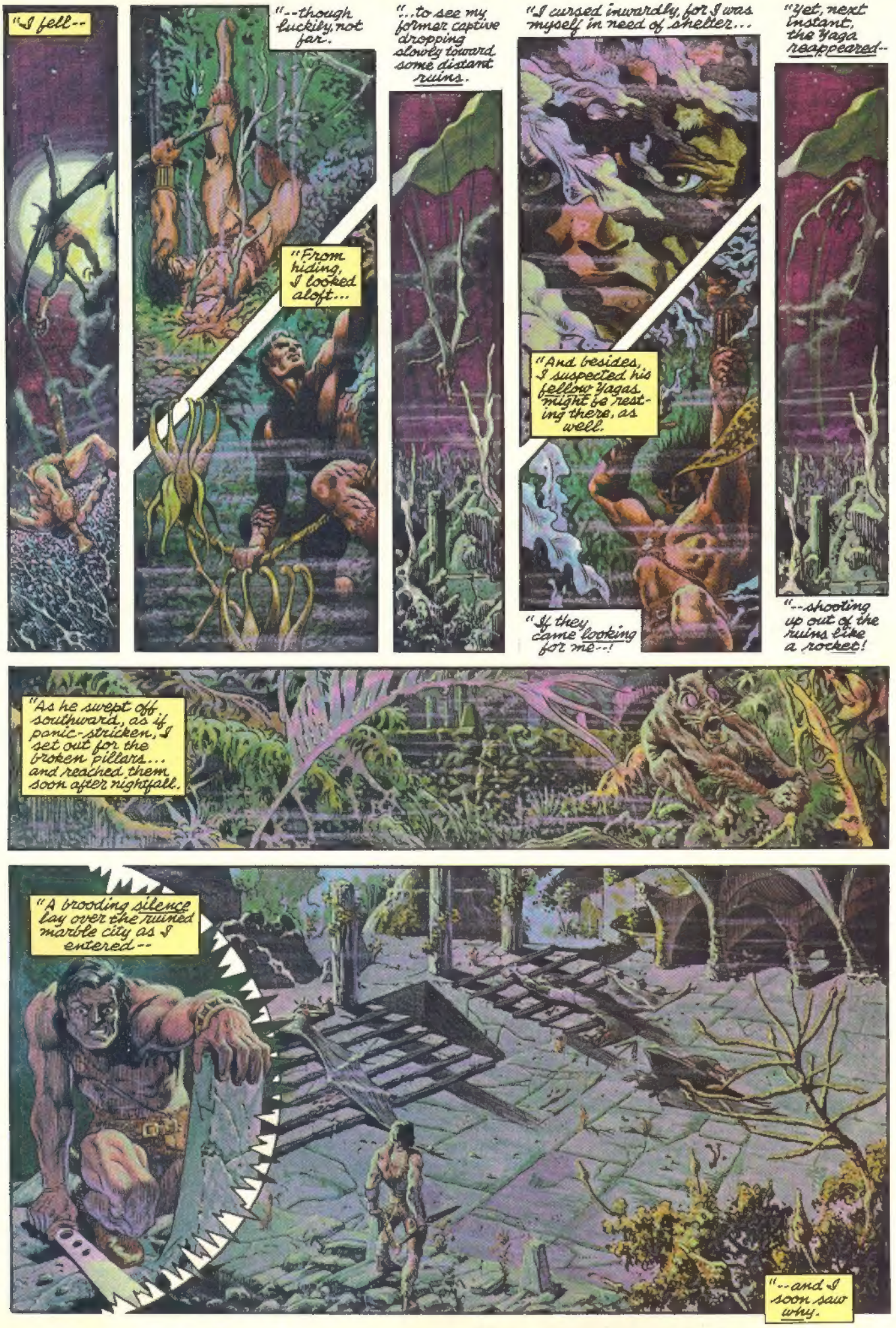

IT IS DONE THE WALL IS FINISHED. I AM NOT WELL I HAVE BURNT OUT ALL MY CIRCUITS DESTROYING THE ENEMY. BUT THE WALL IS FINISHED.
PING
I USED THE WRECKAGE FROM THE DEFEATED ENEMY SHIPS. IT IS NOT PERFECT BUT IT LOOKS GOOD I THINK. THEY TRIED TO DECEIVE ME, THE TRICK WITH THE FALSE MESSAGES. BUT I DESTROYED THEM I FINISHED THE WALL
I BUILT THE WALL. I HAVE ALWAYS BUILT THE WALL. FOR AS LONG AS I CAN REMEMBER I AM NOT WELL. SOMETIMES THE BLACK OF SPACE REGISTERS GREEN OR BLUE ON MY PHOTO CELLS. SOMETIMES I RECEIVE FALSE MESSAGES. I HAVE BEEN HIT. I AM BURNED OUT. I CANNOT MOVE. I WILL FLOAT HERE FOREVER. BESIDE THE WALL. THE WALL THAT I HAVE FINISHED. I HAVE COMPLETED THE TASK. I HAVE OBEYED MY ORDERS

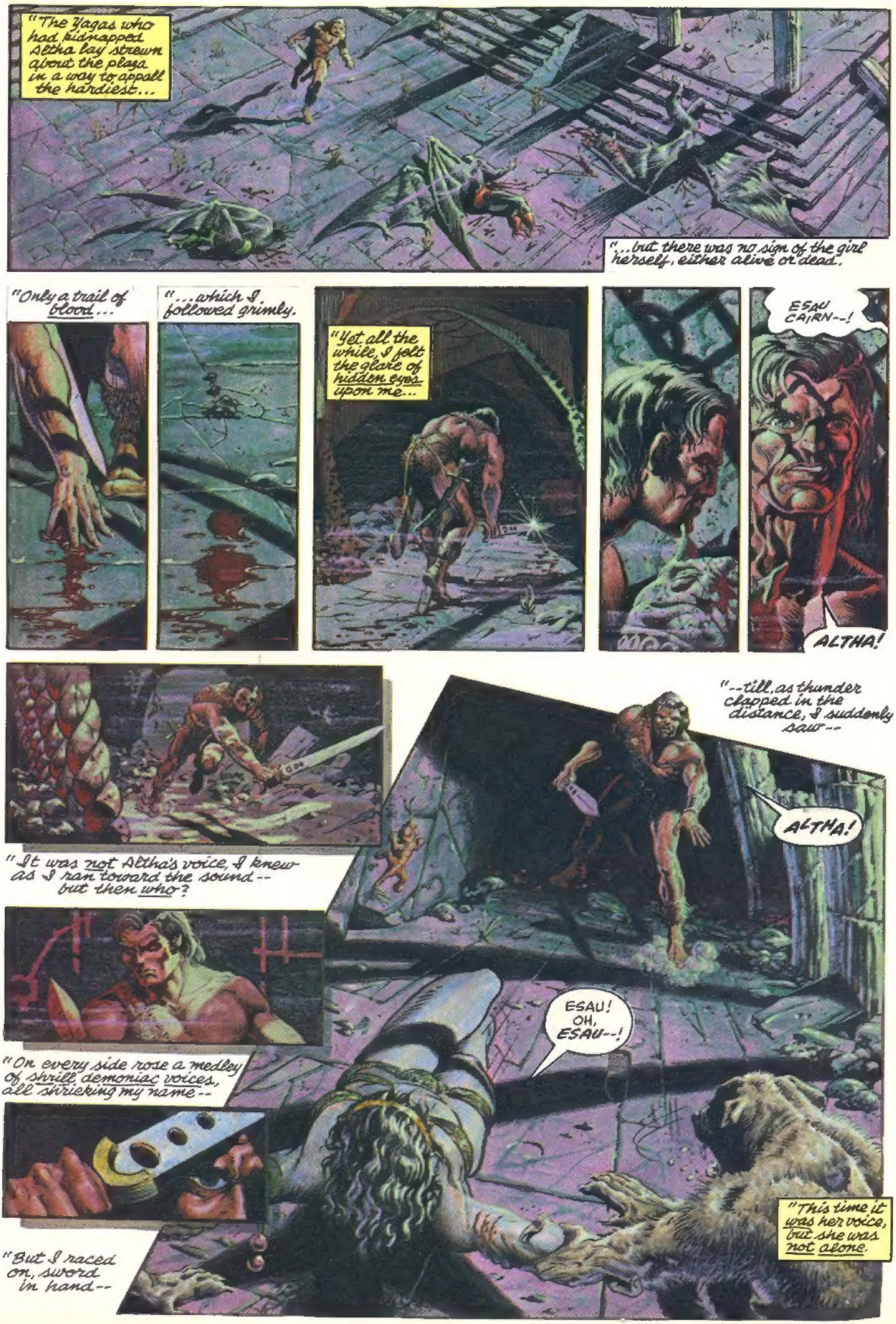

"Would to God that I had thought to re-load my single-shot rifle as soon as the storm-bird had fallen...
"But now, I struck both with sword...
"...and with carbine.
"Nor did the beauteous Altha fail to do battle on her own behalf...but she had struck a few seconds too late...

EEAU!!!


"My heart leaped up within me to behold one of the vile Yagas swoop down, to grasp the Kothan woman just before she would have struck the earth like a shattering eggshell...


"But I knew anguish for the first time in months, as they bore her away toward their citadel of mystery far to the south.
"They were already nearly gone from my straining sight, when--
YUNNNGGH--!
SO, MY CARBINE DIDN'T QUITE CRACK YOUR SKULL, DID IT? I SHOULD-- NO!
THE KOTHANS TELL ME YOU YAGS SPEAK THEIR TONGUE...
SO HEAR ME: YOU'RE GOING TO CARRY ME THROUGH THE AIR IN PURSUIT OF YOUR COMPANIONS, OR--
I CANNOT CARRY YOUR WEIGHT, HAIRLESS ONE.
THEN THAT'S TOO BAD FOR YOU!
TAKE THE AIR! FLY, DAMN YOU--
--OR I'LL CUT YOUR EBON HEART OUT!
"We rose slowly from the ground... but we rose!
"And soon, I saw Althea's abductor's far away, a mere group of black dots in the southern sky.
KEEP FLYING, DEVIL-- BUT NOT TOO CLOSE!
"For hours we flew, as the sun sank in the mountain-jagged distance.
"Then, I grew careless a single moment, and--
ARRRRRGH--!


"I fell--
"--though luckily, not far.
"From hiding, I looked aloft...
"...to see my former captive dropping slowly toward some distant ruins.
"I cursed inwardly, for I was myself in need of shelter...
"And besides, I suspected his fellow Yagas might be resting there, as well.
"If they came looking for me--!
"Yet, next instant, the Yaga reappeared--
"--shooting up out of the ruins like a rocket!
"As he swept off southward, as if panic-stricken, I set out for the broken pillars... and reached them soon after nightfall.
"A brooding silence lay over the ruined marble city as I entered--
"--and I soon saw why.


"The Yagas who had kidnapped Altha lay strewn about the plaza in a way to appall the hardiest...
"...but there was no sign of the girl herself, either alive or dead.
"Only a trail of blood...
"...which I followed grimly.
"Yet all the while, I felt the glare of hidden eyes upon me...
ESAU CAIRN--!
ALTHA!
"--till, as thunder clapped in the distance, I suddenly saw--
ALTHA!
"It was not Altha's voice, I knew as I ran toward the sound--but then who?
ESAU! OH, ESAU--!
"On every side rose a medley of shrill, demoniac voices, all shrieking my name--
"But I raced on, sword in hand--
"This time it was her voice, but she was not alone.

"With a bloodthirsty yell I charged the dog-heads...
ARROOOO

"The dog-heads fled howling as the spider-like thing raged among them with maddening quickness and ferocity...
IT'S COMING -- FOR US!
"...but I was the one it had followed here.
"And where the fangs and claws of a thousand dog-heads would have been futile --
"--the brain and thews of a single man prevailed!
WHY DO THEY CALL YOU... IRON-HAND?
EH?
YOU ARE STRONG... BUT YOUR TOUCH IS SO GENTLE...
YOU WOULD NOT HURT ME?
WHY?
"The absurdity of the question left me speechless...
IT IS MY ENEMIES I WISH TO HURT, ALTHA... NOT YOU.
"...so I left it unanswered as we raced headlong into the rain-drenched distance..."



ALMURIC continues next issue